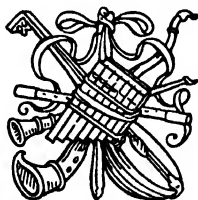


Of Lena Geyer

BY

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TO ALMA GLUCK

Chapter One

SAINT PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL was crowded. All the pews were filled, and the side aisles were full of people standing. Crowds outside were still seeking admission, and the ushers were turning people away from the vestibules. Everyone who had any contact with music in New York was there—bankers and financial powers and art patrons, old women powerful in society and charities and musical patronage, young women in smart black clothes and silver foxes and mink coats; artists, musicians, critics, teachers, students; old Metropolitan stagehands and ushers and chorus-singers, together with hundreds of plain, dowdy nobodies who stood up in the aisles and nudged one another as important people were escorted to reserved pews.

When the funeral procession appeared at two o'clock, the enormous congregation stood up and awaited it with an expectancy almost as keen, I felt, as if the living Lena Geyer were about to make an entrance.

I was to have been a pallbearer, but Mr. Loeffler wanted me to sit in the pew with him and Miss deHaven. We sat there like three dead people, far too moved to show emotion. Behind us, Lena Geyer's old maid, Dora, sat between two other servants who were holding her up because she was so faint. The procession was very long: there were twenty pallbearers, the most prominent men in two generations of New York music. Gatti-Casazza and Bodanzky walked together, Heifetz and Zimbalist, Hofmann and Rachmaninoff, directors of the Metropolitan and the

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Philharmonic, the heads of Schirmer's and Steinway's, George Phillips looking like a corpse, and Scotti weeping openly. Then came a priest bearing a great gold crucifix; then acolytes in red cassocks and lace surplices, with lighted candles; then an altar-boy with the aspsensorium, and behind him, ten black-gloved men bearing on their shoulders the coffin containing the body of Lena Geyer. At the entrance to the sacristy the procession was met by priests in gold-embroidered black vestments, grouped upon the steps. The service was brief; there was no Mass, which had something to do with the fact that Madame Geyer had been married to Henry Loeffler, who was a Jew. I had forgotten that she was born a Catholic, and I remember my surprise when it was decided to hold the funeral in the Cathedral.

In a way it seemed strange to me to be sitting there between Lena Geyer's husband and her closest friend. While the choir was chanting, my mind wandered back over the devious courses of destiny that had brought me here between these two people. I thought of Lena Geyer's illumination of my childhood, which was commonplace enough except for my treasured experiences of her singing. I could see myself, an eager youngster with a shock of black hair, sitting beside my mother in the balcony at the opera house, and feeling, so acutely that the sensation has never diminished, the first glorious impact of that unforgettable sound. We were a musical family; my aunt was a fair pianist and my mother had taken singing lessons, which she gave up when she married. Her father was a serious, pious old Jew; he used to give us balcony tickets to the opera and the old New York Symphony, instead of other luxuries he might have wanted his daughter to have. After he died we did not get seats so often, for my father was a poor store-keeper, but by that time I was in high school, and I used to

save my lunch money for concert and opera tickets, or any money I could earn by cleaning snow off pavements or running errands after school. And when Geyer sang, I would stand in line all day if necessary to get a seat in the gallery.

I never dreamed that I would some day know her. It was enough that every time I heard her sing she lifted me to a plane I could reach in no other way, a world in which only she and I existed. By the time I entered Columbia her voice had become the embodiment of that ideal which haunts all adolescents, and it would put me in a state of physical ecstasy like no other stimulus I have ever experienced. When I finished college in 1921, I realized that I loved music too much to do any dabbling in it, and I decided to devote my life to some profession which would permit me to live in the world of music as much as I wanted, without being a mere hanger-on. I got a job in a publishing house, where I met Robert Goetz, and before very long he and I had set up our own firm of Freeman and Goetz, with Bob handling the business affairs and I the editorial. It is no accident that so many of our books in the past ten years have been on musical subjects.

I need hardly say that our firm was no more than established when I became obsessed with the idea of publishing a book about Lena Geyer—her autobiography if possible. For more than four years I clung to this hope and magnified it in my imagination, without making any effort to see her about it. I still had not met her, though her manager, George Phillips, who was a friend of mine, could have introduced me at any time. I did not want her to think of me as merely another incoherent adorer, of which she had so many. But in 1926, a year after she had retired, I decided that the time had come to speak to her, and I sought and received an appointment at her home at the Plaza. When I got there

she was sitting by the window, looking out at Central Park. She always sat up very straight in a chair, and never seemed quite to relax. She had her hands folded in her lap, and her head thrown back. It was the most magnificent head I have ever seen. She was fifty-one then, but her brown hair was hardly gray, just a little at the temples, and she had never cut it. It was brushed back and done in a knot on her neck. She wore a plain dark dress and no jewelry except her gold wedding ring. She always wore high collars. She had fine-textured white skin, which now showed lines around her throat and on her forehead and cheeks. But the bone structure underneath was so broad and strong that it looked like a young face always. Her eyes were pure green, very clear and prominent, and she looked at me straight and steadily. She held out her large hand and indicated that I was to sit down near her. She asked me immediately why I wished to speak to her, and her manner put me on the defensive. She knew perfectly well who I was, but for some reason she had decided deliberately to give me an impression of indifference and unacquaintance.

I made no headway at all; I asked her if she would consider writing her memoirs or an autobiography for us, and when she shook her head sedately and murmured that nothing would induce her to consider it, I turned in a sort of desperation to my reasons for wanting the book, and spoke of my lifelong worship of her. Her coldness was something of a shock, for everyone I knew, who knew her, had spoken of her personal warmth and heartiness. She made me feel blundering and almost insincere.

With her last, firm refusal, I rose to go. But after I had bowed over her hand, and walked to the door, she spoke again. "Mr. Freeman," she said.

I turned and looked at her from the doorway. She was

gazing, not at me, but out of the window at the panorama of Central Park. I said nothing.

"I have refused to write my memoirs for you," she said. Her voice was low and resonant. "I will not permit any book to be written about me—*now*." She emphasized the last word, while I stood silent, sensing what she was going to say.

"I am not old in years," Lena Geyer said, "but I am old in my world. I shall not live so very long. When I am dead you may publish your book."

I walked back to her chair, my heart pounding.

"Nobody could write this book then, Madame Geyer," I said.

"If you want it badly enough you will find someone to write it."

"How, Madame Geyer? Nobody but you could make it what it should be. If you would write it now I could—I mean——"

"—wait until I die to publish it?" She smiled. "No, my young friend, I shall not write any book. I have said that, and I mean it."

Suddenly I felt in possession of myself for the first time since I had been there. "Why?" I thrust the question at her forcefully.

She looked at me sidewise from beneath her heavy eyebrows. "You really wish to know?"

"Indeed, please."

"Because I would not tell the truth," she said. Our eyes met in a flash of complete understanding. She looked at me steadily, dropping her pretense of distance and patronizing great lady. "You must not publish any book that is not the truth. You must wait until I die, then find the truth and print it."

"Where?"

"Where?" she repeated, and her eyes kindled. "You will have to be clever enough for that." She held out her hand, squarely like a man, a gesture in deep contrast to the feminine wave with which she had dismissed me a moment before. "Good-bye. Go away now and don't bother me about it any more."

I never expected to see her again, and her useless permission to gather material and publish a book about her after her death discouraged me miserably. For weeks I felt as if I never wanted to hear of her again, or publish books at all. Suddenly, one Saturday, my secretary came in to say that Mrs. Loeffler (that was a shock) was on the telephone and wanted to know if I would come out to White Plains for luncheon the next day. I was vastly surprised; of course I accepted. On the way out there I could think of no reason on earth why she might want to see me, unless she had changed her mind about writing the book; and she had no sooner greeted me than I saw that that was not the case. She was pleasant and impersonal; it was merely a typical Sunday family luncheon. There were five of us—her husband, Henry Loeffler, the banker, Miss deHaven, James Huneker, and I. Miss deHaven performed all the functions of the hostess, since Madame Geyer did not like to. I learned later that the substitution was not to Henry Loeffler's taste, though he accepted it with equanimity just as he did all of his wife's idiosyncrasies.

There was nothing striking about the conversation, and I was almost completely silent, for I was glad just to sit there and watch her. She filled the room with electricity, the more remarkably because she was so quiet. She always had that quality. In a crowded room you knew exactly where Lena Geyer was even if you could not see her. She was magnetic,

without possessing any of the external qualities that magnetic people usually have, such as vivacity, social grace, or conversational talent. On the stage of course she always dominated, whether the moment was hers or not. She would go off in a corner with her back to the audience, or crouch, shrouded in rags, as when she sang Kundry, and still it was hard to pay attention to anyone else. Huneker did most of the talking that first afternoon, and Henry Loeffler was a delightful host. He seemed much interested in my business, but that was not surprising, for he had always cared more for books than for finance. He sat after luncheon over cigars, cognac, and coffee, and talked eloquently of paintings and rare books and great music. I can look back now over that afternoon and realize that in a sense he was sounding me out after having spoken with his wife about my request; but the subject of such a book never once came up that day, nor indeed for months afterward.

Lena Geyer definitely had made a decision to see me and to include me in her small circle of friends. She invited me often to luncheon or tea with her in town, and by the time six months had passed I was spending every Sunday afternoon out at White Plains. Her process of reasoning was perfectly clear: she sensed that I would never have dared pursue an acquaintance with her, for fear of being accused of using her friendship to obtain material for a book. She therefore took the initiative, not only in making me her friend, but in gradually and subtly indicating by what means and through what channels I should obtain the material for the book we both tacitly understood would some day be written. By whom—nobody ever said. Not only was I given every opportunity to understand and know her as a person, but before very long I became intimate with the only four living persons who had all the information about her life.

These were Mr. Loeffler; Giulio Pizzetti, her first teacher, who died two years ago; Miss deHaven; and George Phillips.

Slowly I began to gather material, picking it up in conversation and writing down the bits I gleaned, each night before I went to bed. No fact was too plain or too commonplace to be included, for this was to be, if I could make it, the first book about an opera singer that told the truth, that had everything in it, all the trouble and ugliness as well as the glamour and triumphs. For a year I felt my way as best I could, but very often I ran into perfectly natural reticence on the part of her four intimates, when they felt I was probing the matter of her past too deeply. This troubled me, and finally I summoned the courage to speak to her about it. I tried purposely to be circuitous; I said that if there were people in the world who possessed valuable biographical data about a great person, would they not be justified in giving this material to a working biographer only if the subject himself requested them to do so? She gave me a long, quizzical look and changed the subject. But it was not long before I discovered that she had taken a hand. Each of the four became much more communicative, and eventually I discovered that at her own earnest request, each had promised her to co-operate with me and to tell me everything he or she could about the aspects and years of Lena Geyer's life that each knew best. Yet she herself never told me this directly.

But a vital main thread was missing, and I racked my brains to think of a way to sound her out about it. Here was a situation where indirection would get me nowhere, for the subject of my concern was dead, and I felt that Lena Geyer could neither be tricked, cajoled, nor begged into discussing him. I was thinking about the part played in her life by the

famous Duc de Chartres, of whom the whole world knows. After months of silent indecision, I decided to take my courage in my hands and strike. I had lunch alone with her one day and quickly forced myself to the point. I asked her bluntly what I was supposed to do about the Duc de Chartres. She knew why there could be no book without him. To my vast surprise she did not rebuke me, or recoil. Instead she said slowly, "I know that, David."

"Do you also know whether there is anyone from whom I could learn the story of—of—your years with him?"

"If I were a little less realistic I could tell you all that myself," she said.

"But you won't tell me," I answered. "I can see that. How am I going to find out about it?"

She shrugged. For some time she sat silent, twisting a piece of bread between her fingers and staring down at the tablecloth. There was a peculiar expression, half-tender, half-scornful on her face. Her nostrils were dilated. After a time she looked up at me and said, "David, I have that whole story—written down."

I was too surprised to answer. I must have just gaped. Finally I asked her what she meant and what she had.

"A manuscript," she said. "Did you read the memoirs of the duke? They were published by his family after he died."

"Certainly," I answered, and my mind flashed back over them, remembering how little they had contained about Lena Geyer, and how they had disappointed me. The reason for this had never struck me until this moment. I stared at her. I saw the whole thing clearly. "You have part of that book," I exclaimed.

She nodded slowly, not looking at me. She was embarrassed and I knew she hated the feeling. But I felt the upper

hand in this situation and I pushed on. "You must have a big piece of that book," I said. "How did you get it?"

There was a long silence. She was behaving more and more like a child with a guilty conscience. The color rose in her face. She bent her head toward the table and turned a little away from me. I had to lean forward to hear when she answered me.

"I—bought it," she said.

Sitting there in the Cathedral, surrounded by clouds of incense and waves of sound rolling down from the organ loft, I could still hear her voice and see her face as in that poignant moment. Hundreds of other people about me must also have been recalling such moments in silence and secrecy. The huge congregation filled the place with mature and noble quiet, a calm gesture of farewell to one whose work was done. Lena Geyer's tribute from the world was a demonstration of serious respect, which she would rather have had than eulogies. There were Latin prayers and two chants by the choir; then the Archbishop pronounced the benediction, and the procession moved slowly out to Fifth Avenue. Mr. Loeffler and I, with Miss deHaven between us, followed it and got into the first motor. Only a handful of us went to the cemetery, and in the silence of the ride there, crawling over Brooklyn Bridge in the dead gray of the winter afternoon, the full extent of our desolation came over me. Yet as I looked at the grim misery in Henry Loeffler's worn face, and at the shrivelled woman in a black veil beside me, I realized that my despair need not be so profound, nor my world so appallingly empty as theirs. I, at any rate, could keep Lena Geyer alive with me. I could write this book.

Chapter Two

PRAGUE is full of obscure musicians, who add to the lustre of its world-famous music their small contribution of teaching, orchestra playing, and mere atmosphere. It is a city of heavy skies and needlelike spires and ancient palaces, of likewise ancient tenement dwellings with damp stone floors and the honest reek of unabashed humanity. Over all floats a mixed aroma of coffee roasting and soft-coal smoke, together with the smells of luscious, imaginative cooking. These envelop the visitor to the dark heart of the old town, and out from the rickety casement windows, or down through the cluttered, dirty courtyards he will hear the immemorial sounds of voices and fiddles and pianos, assiduously practising.

In one such tenement, in the winter of 1888, Giulio Pizzetti was giving a singing lesson to a Czech girl who was soon to make her début in the perilous rôle of Rosina, in *The Barber of Seville*. Pizzetti thought this regrettable, for while the girl's voice was good, she was devoid of musicianly instinct, and he was despondent over the hopelessness of getting anything into her head. As she botched Rossini's phrases, he scowled and played *Una Voce Poco Fa* with one hand, clutching his black hair with the other. The world would hold him accountable for all her stupid mistakes, and he could not prevent her début because somebody behind her was wealthy enough to promote it.

He raised his eyes to the small window that let in what remained of God's daylight. *Basta!* Gray street, gray walls,

gray drizzle, and gray skies. This was a typical Prague winter; he had not seen the sun for a month and he had rheumatism in his right arm. For a young man of thirty-one this was the final indignity. Nobody had rheumatism in Bologna where he had been born, and where, as a child, he had been famed for his extraordinary soprano voice. His father, who worked in a sausage factory, had scraped together enough money to have him taught by the greatest ecclesiastical teacher in Italy; from the age of nine until his voice broke at about fourteen Giulio had been the soprano soloist in the cathedral choir and people had travelled from afar to hear him. His mature voice turned out to be a baritone of mediocre quality, and he never pretended to superior dramatic talent. After a few desultory years in small opera companies, he realized that he could not meet his own standard of singing, which was extremely high; he decided to become a teacher.

And there he found his true work, for he was an exacting musician with minute knowledge of the voice and a passion for excellence that had not yet been satisfied in any pupil. Pizzetti's closest friend was an excitable operatic stage director named Pietro Ceccarini, and when this ball-of-fire was engaged in 1885 to go to Prague to work at the Royal Opera, he dragged Giulio along, refusing to live alone in a "wilderness." Giulio could find plenty of good voices to teach in Prague, Pietro said. So here he was, teaching plenty of voices, but never one with anything to inspire him. Full of melancholy, he let his budding Rosina struggle through to the end of her aria, and then he rose abruptly.

"I have a headache," he said, "and my arm hurts. Let that be enough for today." Eager to be rid of his pupil, he strode to the hall door and threw it open. As he did so the crouched figure of an old woman fell across the threshold.

Pizzetti was startled enough, but when the woman lifted her face he could only stare at her in amazement. For she was none other than Marta, the old woman who cleaned his rooms and washed his clothes; and he could not for the life of him imagine why she should be eavesdropping at a music lesson. Pressed for an explanation, Marta blushed, stammered, and threw her black apron over her head. Pizzetti leaned down and took her hand and drew her into his room. He and Marta, it seems, having no language in common, spoke principally by means of signs, though they got along in broken German, hers mostly Czech and his mostly Italian. He had really never taken a good look at the old woman before that day. Now he saw that she must be nearly sixty, of that shabby and blowsy old age that early overtakes peasant women, with gray hair, several missing teeth, many wrinkles, and hands become grimy claws from hard and dirty work. She wore the usual six or seven varicolored heavy petticoats, one of which she used as a handkerchief, a thick woolen shawl, and a cheap, brightly printed kerchief tied over her head, the kind you buy in the market for a copper. Pizzetti asked her to sit down, but she would not do that. She remained standing, a shapeless bundle of heavy clothes with an apronstring about its middle, twisting her gnarled fingers.

"Marta," he asked her again, "why are you so interested in my pupil?"

Because she loved singing, Marta told him.

"All Bohemians do," Pizzetti said. "There must be some other reason. Are you interested in some special person?" It was clear that she was, and he was not greatly surprised to extract from her at last that her interest lay in her own daughter. Marta explained this in a painful excess of shyness.

Pizzetti was not much intrigued by such a theatrical possibility as the discovery of a voice in his charwoman's daughter. However, he asked a few questions about the girl, and presently, her age.

"Thirteen," Marta said.

He restrained an impulse to laugh. After all, the mother's passionate concern had implied to him that the girl must be mature, somebody in whose behalf he might have to make some immediate effort if he were interested. He was amazed, too, at Marta's having such a young child. He asked her about it. She shrugged. Lenzka was the youngest of nine, and Marta had been, as she remembered it, forty-four when the child was born. Her husband had died shortly afterward.

"And you support nine children by cleaning the rooms in this dwelling-house?"

Partly, Marta said; two of the children worked already. The oldest son had gone to America, and two girls had married. Two were dead. Lenzka and the next older, a boy with a crippled leg, stayed at home and went to school. She added eagerly that Lenzka was bright, and could read and write in German. They taught only German in those days of the Empire.

Pizzetti would probably have dropped the whole matter there, with some kind word about hearing the child when she was older, but old Marta was so consumed with eagerness and suspense that he told her, weakly, to bring the girl round on Sunday afternoon when he was free. Marta kissed his hand, invoked the blessing of Saint Ludmila on him, and shuffled away.

He had forgotten the episode when Sunday came round and Marta appeared at his door leading her child by the hand.

Lenzka looked just about like any other Bohemian child

of her age. She had a broad, somewhat flattened face, prominent eyes of a peculiar greenish gray, large nostrils, and a wide, rather thin-lipped mouth. Her mouse-colored hair hung in two long braids down her back, and she was short for her age, rather stocky. She stood awkwardly, with her hands hanging forward and a dull expression on her face. Pizzetti saw that she was going to be too shy to talk, so he gave her and her mother each a thimbleful of sweet wine and left them alone for a few minutes while he pretended to be busy at his desk. Presently he sat down at the piano and said, "Come here, Lenzka, and sing something for me."

He had expected the child to hang back, blush, put her forefinger in her mouth, or even bury her head in her mother's skirts. To his surprise she did none of those things. Though she had not said a word in fifteen or twenty minutes, she walked calmly to the piano and stood beside him expectantly. He asked her in German what she could sing. Lenzka named four or five songs, which he recognized as Czech folk-tunes that she would obviously know. He knew no accompaniments for them and told her so.

Lenzka grinned and told him she had never sung with a piano in her life, nor ever been near one except in the musicians' rooms she sometimes helped her mother clean. He laughed at his own stupidity and told the child to go ahead and sing one of her Czech songs.

It was nothing remarkable. The voice was pretty, less childish than he had expected, but still far too young. Pizzetti had known, to his disapproval, of young girls who started singing in public as children, but he considered such practices disastrous as well as shockingly unmusical. He restrained his impulse to terminate the interview quickly only because old Marta in the corner was gazing at Lenzka with

such burning pride that she communicated to him some of her own intense concern. His curiosity was aroused. He drew the child toward him and asked if she had ever heard an opera.

Lenzka nodded eagerly. The elder brother of one of her classmates was an usher in the gallery at the opera house and once he had smuggled the two children in and let them sit on some steps after the lights went out.

"And what was the opera?" Pizzetti asked.

"*Don Juan*," Lenzka answered.

"Did you like it?"

Lenzka nodded vigorously, flapping her pigtails.

"Did you recognize any of the music?"

She nodded again. One could hardly live in Prague and not have heard it.

"Could you remember any of the arias?"

"*Ja*," Lenzka said quietly.

"Which one?"

"All of them," she answered.

He did not believe her and said so.

The child flushed and for a moment he thought she was going to cry. But she said, "Maestro, I can show you if you like. I do know them. Which one shall I sing?"

For answer he turned to the keyboard and began to play *Batti Batti*. This having no prelude in the accompaniment, Lenzka waited the first half-bar and picked it up at the second. Pizzetti was surprised that she knew the words (which she sang in German) but he soon forgot that in his amazement at the way she sang. The childish and unresonant voice was the same, but here in difficult music, singing for the first time with accompaniment, she delivered what he always said later was the kind of a musical performance you could never teach anybody; if God had not put it there, there was no

learning it. She knew nothing of the technique singers are taught before undertaking such music. She breathed and phrased by blind instinct.

"And it was right," Pizzetti would say, remembering that moment. "God knows it was right. She had everything to learn, and years to wait before she could begin to study—but a musician!"

Lenzka, having finished, wiped her nose on the back of her hand and waited for the Maestro to say something. When he was sufficiently recovered from his surprise (for he was determined not to over-encourage old Marta by too much approval) he asked her if she wanted to sing any more *Don Juan* arias.

"Yes, if you like," Lenzka said. So they proceeded to *Mi Tradi*. He knew, of course, that she was totally unequipped to sing such a thing—in fact at that time he doubted if her voice would ever have the volume and brilliance to attempt it. He was ready to predict for her a light lyric voice, a voice that might have been trained into a coloratura if she had been a gay Italian child. It was not in fact her voice but her memory and her musical instinct that fascinated him. Any one who could sense music as she did, at the age of thirteen and totally untaught too, was worth keeping an eye on. And that was what he told old Marta when he sent her home. He told her he would teach the girl when the time came, but that the time would not come for four or five years. Meanwhile Marta must make two promises—the first, not to allow the girl to sing at all, the second to give her piano lessons.

Poor Marta was discouraged. Evidently she had expected the Maestro to take Lenzka under his wing at once, teach her for a year or two, get her a position in the opera, and thus make them all rich by a miracle. "Four or five years" sounded to her like a lifetime. Pizzetti explained to her patiently why

Lenzka's voice would be ruined if she were allowed to sing now, indeed that Lenzka could hardly yet be said to have a voice, only the seed of one which must be left dormant if it were to bloom at the right time. He told her the child had remarkable instinctive musicianship that ought to be developed through the piano. Was there any way of giving her lessons? Marta shrugged sullenly. She had no money. She had no piano. And—here she began to cry and dig her grimy fists into her eyes—she had not wanted Lenzka to play the piano anyhow. Lenzka must sing. God had given Lenzka her voice. God would strike them all if they ignored it.

Lenzka had been watching this scene with narrowed eyes and with growing emotion affecting her lumpy exterior. Suddenly she astonished Pizzetti by bursting into a torrent of rapid and unintelligible Czech, lashing her mother with words, and turning desperately toward the Maestro for corroboration. He understood nothing and stood helpless, half-eager to get rid of the old woman and her unkempt child, half-impelled to watch this outburst of dramatic temper.

"Spricht Deutsch," he kept saying, *"Deutsch sprechen!"*

He repeated this several times before the child, pausing for breath, realized that he was trying to understand her. Then she whirled round, and in German almost as rapid and torrential, with passionate gestures, assured him that she believed every word he said, that her mother must be crazy to question the great Maestro's directions, that she would promise not to open her mouth, never to sing a note until he told her to, and that she even knew how she could get piano lessons—if he thought it so important.

"Where will you get piano lessons?" old Marta squawked furiously. "Who is going to pay for them? Will the Emperor buy you a *Flügel*, perhaps?"

"No," the child said. "I will take over the cleaning of

Herr Schrattenbach's rooms, upstairs here, instead of you, and ask him to pay me with lessons. Probably he will let me practise on his piano . . . or he will know somewhere that I can."

"*Ja*," screamed Marta, shaking her fist, "then you get these crazy piano lessons and I get no two crowns weekly from Herr Schrattenbach. A fine idea that!"

Pizzetti was shocked and annoyed. He had believed in Marta's passionate absorption in Lenzka, but he had not realized how mercenary she was. At that moment he was ready to wash his hands of the old woman entirely, but he realized what two crowns meant to her—so much bread, so much meat, so much of the rent.

"See here," he said to Marta, "you go home and stop screaming like an old she-devil. If you do care for Lenzka you must believe what I say. I shall pay you a crown a week extra if you promise me not to nag Lenzka."

He pushed her toward the door. Marta stopped at the threshold and got down on her knees, clinging to Pizzetti's hands. She kissed them and thanked him over and over. At last he had her out of the room, and Lenzka beside her, who had lost all trace of the passion that had swept her a few moments before. She was a little Bohemian lump again, blank-faced and stolid. She bobbed her head at him. "*Dank*," she said, and turned to clump down the stairs.

Pizzetti closed the door firmly after them and one can imagine him sighing with relief. Yet he was not permitted to dismiss Lenzka from his mind, because the queer little girl at once began to put her plan into action. For about a year Pizzetti used to see or hear her passing up and down stairs to Herr Schrattenbach's rooms above. She had found another house in which to practise, but Schrattenbach gave her piano lessons and told Pizzetti that she was immensely talented.

"But of course," he said, "she is no pianist. She is not really interested in it."

"She's no singer either, so far as I know," Pizzetti said, determined not to indulge in illusions.

"You can't tell," said Schrattenbach, whose relationship with the emotional Marta had never been so personal as Pizzetti's and who was therefore more willing to give Lenzka her due. "Anyway, she works like a little fiend."

"Ah, work!" sighed Pizzetti, remembering his own childhood. "Sometimes it gets you nowhere."

Nevertheless, after a year with Schrattenbach, Lenzka knew more about the piano than most singers ever do. She had a colossal appetite for music. She had promised not to sing, and she kept her promise; but nobody could have kept her from humming. She hummed every melody she ever heard. Pizzetti used to hear her when the doors were open in summer, scrubbing Schrattenbach's floor and scouring his porcelain stove, humming her ever-increasing repertoire, which now included some piano music. On rare occasions her friend's brother smuggled her into the opera house, and after those evenings she would stop Pizzetti in the hallway, dancing with excitement, her eyes big as pinwheels.

"Maestro, I heard *Aida!*—*Aida!* Now I know *Aida!*"

So that year went by, and then the tragedy occurred. It was tragedy only from little Lenzka's point of view, but tragedy just the same. Oscar Hammerstein had stopped in Prague to pick up artists for his new opera house in New York, and he engaged Ceccarini as coach and assistant stage director. But instead of rejoicing at this offer, Ceccarini came running to Pizzetti in a state of terror, quite unnerved by the thought of crossing the Atlantic alone. He was a round, fat ball of a man, with a short fringe of stiff black curls around his bald cranium, and black popeyes. He had

a big black mustache like a bandit, and when he succumbed to panic the effect was incredible. He lay on Pizzetti's bed actually weeping, and insisting over and over again that he was afraid of the water—he did not dare cross the ocean. Arguments were useless. The new assistant stage director of the Manhattan Opera Company refused to leave Europe at all unless Pizzetti went with him. And since his rheumatism was particularly bad that day Pizzetti said he would go.

He never thought of the scrubwoman's child as anything serious enough to deter him. When he told her he was going to America she seemed hardly to realize the meaning of his words, but stood on one foot, hanging her head. Thinking she was too dull and inarticulate to care much about it, he patted her shoulder and told her not to mind. But then she raised her head and he saw big tears rolling slowly down her cheeks. He was strangely disturbed. He had a premonitory instinct that he might be making a mistake.

Nevertheless he said, "These things happen in life, Lenzka. I have my way to make in the world."

"Ja," she mumbled, "but what becomes of me?"

"You will be all right. When you are ready to begin singing lessons—in two or three years, now—go to Morini here. I have spoken to him about you." He paused, wanting to say something more, unable to make sense of his own perturbation. "And some day, Lenzka," he finished lamely, "perhaps we will all be together again, maybe in America. Who knows?"

She only cried more bitterly and shook her head.

Chapter Three

IN New York Pizzetti found good pupils and hearty Italian friends, even some old ones from his boyhood in Bologna. There was plenty to eat and drink; there was music to be heard; there was more money floating around than he had ever seen before; and in short, he liked New York better than any place he had ever lived. The lumpy little girl in Prague with the wonderful musical instinct easily slipped from his mind. He had promised to write her, but of course he never did; and in three or four years, had anyone mentioned her name he might have been puzzled to place it.

It was in the winter of 1894 that her trail crossed his again, and in a harrowing way. He was climbing the stairs to his flat on the second floor of a West Side brownstone front, after a hilarious supper with his friends, when he felt his arm clutched suddenly in the dark. Scared to a cold sweat, he leaped aside and shook off the bony hand. "What do you want?" he cried.

The answer was a sob and a flood of gibberish in a cracked voice. Pizzetti stepped up to the landing, lit the gas, and turned to behold a bent, shawled old hag cowering on the stairs below him. Head bowed, the woman climbed up to the landing and threw herself at his feet, clasping him around the knees. As he gazed at her, trying to overcome his repulsion, he felt unnerved; it was all too horribly familiar. He leaned down and peered at her. Her head was covered

by a torn black shawl and under it her face was contorted and streaked with dirt. As her two bony claws fastened themselves again around his arm, he recognized her in a flash: Marta, the old charwoman from Prague.

Hearing her name, realizing that he recognized her, Marta began to sob even louder. He led her into his flat and put her in a chair. Almost at once she was on her knees again. Pizzetti sat down and tried to talk to her. He wanted to find out how she had got there, but she was incoherent. He went for some bread and wine, thinking she might be starving, but she pushed these away and went on mumbling. "Lenzka," she said. "Lenzka."

Ah, yes!—that queer little girl. Pizzetti was now intensely interested, and set about forcibly quieting the old woman. Where was Lenzka?

In a hospital downtown somewhere—Bellevue, he gathered. If Marta was not exaggerating, she was dying. When this news emerged from the confusion, he arose and reached for his hat. Marta stared at him and shook her head violently, finally conveying that he would not be allowed to see Lenzka so late at night.

But might she not be dead if they waited until morning?

She might. So they had better go at once. He handed the old woman out the door and down the stairs, trying to understand her hopeless jargon of Czech and German. They walked to the elevator as quickly as she could manage, and on the way downtown he sought a little enlightenment. How, for instance, had she been able to find him?

Marta shrugged. "Lenzka," she said.

"Did Lenzka know where I was?"

Marta nodded.

"For how long?"

"Six months, maybe longer."

"But why didn't she come to me sooner?"

He had to lean down to catch the answer.

"Sie war beschämt."

Then he realized what was the matter with Lenzka. He felt like crying. He could not see how any of this had come about and could only guess at the harrowing story that had ended in Bellevue. It was certainly no use asking Marta. By the time they reached the hospital it was two in the morning and the doors were bolted. They went to the accident entrance to try to get in, but what with the hospital rules, the Irish guard, and Pizzetti's broken English, they met with no success whatever. The guard merely shook his head and waved them away. Orders were orders—they would have to wait until seven in the morning. The Maestro was about to give up when the door of the accident room opened and a young interne in a white suit stepped out—an Italian, as Pizzetti could see. The situation was explained in a few words. The doctor took them inside and motioned them to a bench against the wall. Pizzetti had never been in a hospital before and the smell of carbolic acid and iodoform and other nineteenth-century disinfectants turned his stomach. The passage stank of drugs and ether and stale cabbage and putrefaction, and the air was clammy from damp floors always being scrubbed and never getting clean. One gas jet was burning at the end of the long, gray corridor. The place was quiet, like a catacomb, but he had a feeling that something terrible might break the silence at any minute, and they had not waited long before the terrible thing happened—a high, piercing scream that rang down the hollow passageway and froze their marrow. Old Marta cowered; Pizzetti, though a sensible man, paced the floor in agitation.

They waited nearly an hour. Marta, worn out, had fallen

asleep and Pizzetti laid her on the bench and covered her with his overcoat. He paced up and down the hall, trying to piece together the fragments he had understood of her story, wondering why he cared about it at all, and why he should be spending a cold December night in the basement of a pest-house with a crazy old woman whose daughter had got into trouble and was perhaps dead somewhere in that labyrinth right then. He thought for a moment of tucking some money into Marta's fist and slipping out and leaving her there. But he knew he could not do it. He waited.

At last he heard the young Italian's footsteps down the hall. Was Lenzka dead? No—the interne shook his head gravely—but she might be at any time soon; she had puerperal fever, and a bad case. But they could not get into the ward to see her. It was positively against all rules and nothing he had said to the night superintendent had moved him. They would have to wait until eight in the morning when the doctor in charge came to make rounds, or they could go away and come back then.

"And her child?"

"A boy."

"Alive?"

"No, thank God."

This hard-boiled rejoinder caused the Maestro to recoil, though when he came to think about it he knew that the interne was right. For the moment, he had no time to reflect; the problem was what to do with Marta whom he was not at all anxious to awaken. The interne suggested he leave her there all night, adding that she was lucky to be under a roof, and although Pizzetti again shrank before this professional sangfroid, he really had no alternative. The interne was in fact very kind. He offered Pizzetti his own bed in a boarding-house around the corner, so that the Maestro

could be on hand the first thing in the morning. He himself would be on duty until seven.

So Pizzetti left Marta sleeping on the bench and spent the night in the interne's room. This bit of his story is interesting because today, at sixty-five, that same Italian is one of the most celebrated surgeons in the world, at the head of his profession in New York. He has always loved music and has been a good friend to musicians. He took care of Pizzetti in his long incurable illness, and came to the funeral with wife and daughters, and never accepted any pay.

At eight the next morning Pizzetti was back at the hospital to find Marta on the bench where he had left her. She was relatively quiet. After some waiting and confusion they were directed upstairs to the maternity wards and as they progressed through the hospital the scene repelled the Maestro even more strongly. Smells, groans, whimpers, querulous wails, angry exclamations, and delirious howls mingled with the crash of cutlery and pans in the kitchens, the clank of stretchers and dressing wagons wheeled through the halls, and the roar of the elevated outside. Hard-faced young women in starched blue uniforms tramped through the halls; at the door of the ward they were stopped by one who looked particularly formidable and who would never have let them pass if Pizzetti had not been armed with a note from the superintendent.

They followed her down a long narrow room lined with a double row of battered iron beds, each occupied by a silent woman in gray flannel shift. Each face seemed stunned and each was framed in two braids of colorless hair. Here the smell was stifling, a thick odor of humanity and carbolic acid and the bad coffee that had been served two hours before. At the far end of the room a white cotton screen had been drawn around one bed. Marta pointed to it excitedly.

Pizzetti motioned her to keep quiet, and they stepped around the screen. The first thing that struck him was the length of the girl on the narrow bed. He remembered a short, plump youngster in Prague, but here, under the thin gray blanket, he saw the outline of a very tall woman, so gaunt that the body barely made an impression above the mattress. The figure lay absolutely still; he would have thought it dead had he not known otherwise. The eyes were closed, the hands, broad, rough, and bony, lay flat alongside the body. He was surprised that he could stare at the face with so little emotion. It was like a dead face, a color which he graphically described as that of Romana cheese, ridged by the big bones of the skull into deep contours and hollows. The skin was stretched tight. Though the girl was only nineteen, the face was ageless, a peasant face eloquent of hardship and endurance. Pizzetti said that as he stood there, quite aware that the girl was dying, he was overwhelmed by a sense of indomitable strength, conveyed to him by the sight of that broad Slavic head and the great wide shoulder bones below it.

The doctor was just ending his visit and now stopped to speak to them. He seemed kind enough, not unduly interested in the case, but conscientious. He thought Pizzetti was a relative and Maestro did not trouble to inform him otherwise. He said the girl might die during the day but that such cases occasionally recovered. She would probably alternate between fits of delirium and coma.

This happened according to prediction, and for forty-eight hours Lenzka lay more dead than alive, in a raging fever, with two nurses working to bring her through. Her pitiful case had gripped Pizzetti's imagination. During these days he had no thought of her as a musician or singer, for indeed he did not know whether she could sing; but as an example

of human misery she wrung his heart and he spent most of his time pacing the waiting room and quieting Marta's noisy hysterics. On the third day, at last, Lenzka became conscious, and as he peered cautiously around the screen that shielded her from the rest of the ward, her eyes met his for the first time in complete recognition. It was a critical moment—the surprise of seeing him might have caused her a relapse—but her reaction was not one of surprise. She simply closed her eyes again and heavy tears began rolling down her cheeks onto the pillow. Pizzetti sat down beside her and took her hand and stayed utterly silent until the nurse told him to go. Then as he arose he pressed her hand and she gave him a feeble squeeze in return. But she did not speak at all.

Of course, all this time, his head had been buzzing with questions that he wanted to ask. How had she come here? Why? When? How had she found him? Why had she not looked him up sooner? He could get satisfactory answers to none of these from Marta, yet to question Lenzka before she had recuperated was equally impossible. He continued to visit her, discovering, much to his amazement, that she spoke fluent English. Had he himself known the language better he would have recognized the vocabulary and accent of the East Side, but what puzzled him at the time was how she had learned to speak so much better than he could. Since he had always had trouble with German, and since she did not then know Italian, English was the language they used. With the help of the hospital superintendent they disposed of Marta, on the grounds that Lenzka had to be kept quiet, and after that things went smoothly and Lenzka improved so much that they could really talk.

The story which he succeeded in piecing together and which he finally passed on to me was the simple, tragic tale

of those millions who came to America, when the gates were open, to escape an all but intolerable existence in nineteenth-century Europe. Perhaps nowhere in history is there to be found such blind human faith in human things as in the dirty holds of those old vessels whose names have only recently disappeared from the world's harbors. These people came with fantastic plans for a new life upon the magnificent assumption that Man would provide, in a land whose language they could not speak, and of whose customs and laws they had only the vaguest notions, from hearsay or at school, or from cheap translations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Little Women*. They landed in the slums of the new cities, they were exploited, some starved, but somehow that faith that had caused them to dare the sea was at least partially justified. They have now, for the most part, become the mothers and fathers of the nation at which they stared with wide eyes thirty, forty, fifty years ago. They, and not the defeated South or decadent New England, are now the custodians of Thomas Jefferson's ideals.

In that naïve and beggarly horde, in 1890, were Marta and Lenzka. It seems that shortly after Pizzetti had left Prague, Lenzka's little brother Alois, the cripple, had died. Marta and Lenzka were left alone, and they wrote to Brother Vaclav in America asking him if it would be possible for them to join him over there. This, of course, had been Lenzka's idea—for was not the great Maestro in America, who had said that she could take lessons in four or five years? Vaclav approved of the plan; America was a wonderful country and he would like to have them live with him. He worked in the coal mines near Scranton, Pennsylvania, had never married, and was tired of living in a bunkhouse with the other Hunkies. Lenzka and Mama could keep house for him in a shack of his own! It was a magnificent project,

and he sent them his savings of eighty dollars with which to execute it.

The voyage was something that Lenzka would not easily forget—thirteen days sleeping on a heaving iron floor with rats, bugs, sick women, and little babies. She and Marta were sick all the time. They arrived in New York on Christmas Day four years before the unhappy episode in Bellevue Hospital that I have just described, and they were taken to Castle Garden where Vaclav was supposed to meet them. But Vaclav was not there. Pending his arrival they were consigned to one of the big wardlike rooms where the immigrants of those days were housed, and here they waited a week in dire anxiety. At length they showed Vaclav's letter to one of the interpreters and this man wrote to Vaclav telling him that they were waiting. Another week went by and no answer. They had to get out, but since they had practically no money left the question was where to go. At last a letter came from Scranton. But not from Vaclav. There had been a mine explosion and Vaclav was dead.

The officials at Castle Garden wanted to send them back to Prague, but since they could not pay the passage, this was out of the question. They had about three dollars left of the money Vaclav had sent them, and with this they were allowed to enter the United States. They got a room with a Jewish family in Allen Street and Lenzka went to work hemming skirts in a place where their Jewish friends all worked. But she was a wretched seamstress and was fired. It was a crisis, with Marta making things worse by scolding Lenzka and even beating her; but finally Lenzka got another job in a paper-bag factory in the cellar of a house in Division Street, where she made forty cents a day pasting bags. Once in a while Marta earned a little by cleaning rooms or washing dishes, but she was entering her dotage and was almost

completely dependent upon Lenzka. In a few months the man who owned the bag factory started making boxes too. He bought a machine that made tin corners on the boxes and Lenzka ran it—twelve hours a day.

All this time she was thinking of Pizzetti, but she was very proud and wanted to be something better than a Bohunk boxmaker before seeing him again. Part of the improvement that she wished to achieve was the mastery of good English, and in pursuit of this she used to collect all the newspapers that she could find—she never had money to buy any but would pick them up from park benches—and read them every night before going to bed. Her favorite reading matter was the music news and she followed the affairs of the Metropolitan and the Manhattan Operas minutely. Once she saw Ceccarini's name and with it a short passage about his friend Giulio Pizzetti, the singing teacher, who had come to America with him from Prague. She was so excited by this that she cried all night; but she made no move to look him up. Though she had been promoted to forelady of the box factory, she was still too proud.

Whether Pizzetti ever knew the details of Lenzka's sordid romance at that time, I do not know. I suspect that he knew some of them, but whenever we came upon this part of her story he would always change the subject, or sometimes stare at me coldly with his big eyes, as much as to say, that is none of your business. I never pressed him on the point, because it seemed obvious enough—the story of a half-ignorant girl waylaid in East Side New York in the nineties. What would there be to tell beyond the name of her lover, which Pizzetti certainly never knew? When she discovered her plight, Lenzka of course, like any other girl of her age, attempted to conceal it; but Marta discovered it in a few months and there was a crisis. The old hag supposed that

she was disgraced ; she beat Lenzka with a broom handle and made her sleep on the floor. Worse, when her employer caught on, he fired her, and in her condition she could not get another job. The few dollars she had put aside lasted for about two weeks, but after that they had nothing and Marta began nagging Lenzka to find Pizzetti and borrow some money from him. Sometimes she would scold her all night in a high raucous voice, and what with this and what with lack of food Lenzka got very sick and thought she was going to die. She conceived a desperate plan to get Pizzetti's address without his knowing it, just in case the worst should happen. She asked a Jewish friend of hers to go to Ceccarini, at the opera house, pretend that she wanted to take singing lessons, and ask him Pizzetti's address. The plan worked. Ceccarini gave the address readily enough and Lenzka wrote it down and put it in her pocketbook, where Marta found it after she had been taken to the hospital.

Sitting beside her bed listening to this talk, Pizzetti's emotions may be imagined. Lenzka spoke in a matter-of-fact voice, unmoved by her own misfortunes, and although her external appearance had changed enormously from that of the lumpish little child in Prague, he found that her character had not really altered at all. She bore hardship because she had never known anything else. Only when she spoke of reading the music news in papers salvaged from ashcans and benches did her voice lift and her eyes shine ; a transformation which reminded Pizzetti of those moments in Prague when she had come to life so unexpectedly, yet so passionately, beside his piano. And so he put the question to her. He asked her if she had ever tried to sing.

Her reply was touching in the extreme. She turned her face toward him and he felt quite awed by the change in it. The heavy mask was gone ; she looked at him with glistening

green eyes and smiled in a way he would not have thought possible from her—wistful, tender, and arch. "Maestro," she said, "didn't I promise you I wouldn't sing?"

"And you never did?"

"No. When we first came here I was still remembering everything you said in Prague. Then later it got so I never thought of anything except money and the box factory. I had nothing to sing about—so I didn't."

Pizzetti patted her hand. No doubt it was just as well, he thought. She had suffered enough without undertaking a career that could not really be hers; and he dropped the subject entirely. When she was discharged from the hospital he sent her to a farm he knew about in the Catskills, where the scene was quiet, the air good, and the board cheap and wholesome. With some misgivings he sent old Marta along too, a step that turned out more luckily than he could have hoped. In her youth Marta had been a dairymaid on an estate in Bohemia, and she was so overjoyed at the sight of a cow that she took complete possession of the three animals on the farm and proved so handy that the people said she could stay and do chores for her board. The release from this burden was really the first turning point in Lenzka's fortunes.

With the Maestro's assistance Lenzka got a job as a sales-girl in a little stationery and sheet-music store on Broadway near Ninety-eighth Street. She found a furnished room for two dollars a week, a cubbyhole with one dormer window on the top floor of a brownstone house near Amsterdam Avenue. Her pay was seven dollars. She bought some remnants of dress goods in a fire sale and one of her Jewish friends made her two dresses and a suit—the latter a skirt and jacket that Pizzetti could describe to his last day. He used to say that in all the beautiful clothes and opera costumes she ever

wore, Lenzka never looked so well as she did that winter of 1895 in New York. Her suit was of dark gray cloth, trimmed with black and white soutache braid, and she wore high-necked white muslin shirtwaists that she had to wash and iron in the basement of her boarding-house three nights a week. She had only two shirtwaists; one had eyelets and the other dots. Her best dress was dark red alpaca, and her other one tan poplin. She alternated her clothes in regular order and when Pizzetti forgot what day of the week it was he could tell if he saw Lenzka.

But if she was a striking, she was not a beautiful girl. Her face was so broad and bony that it looked too heavy to respond to inward animation. Her strange green eyes were enormous under heavy lids, and in repose her wide mouth was firmly set and seemed even unimaginative. In those days corsets gave all women wasp waists, or as near as they could come to them, and Lenzka's figure was ill-suited to the fashion. She was physically a big, broad-hipped, free-moving animal, and Pizzetti said sometimes he almost expected her to shake off her corsets and tight-waisted skirts like a cat escaping from a tangle of string. Her high collars made her look even more cramped and unnatural, but strangely enough she liked them; she used to say that she liked the feel of her throat-muscles straining against the collars while she was singing.

As a child she had been pale, and when Pizzetti found her in Bellevue she was a ghastly color. But within three months, with better food and mental peace, her skin began to glow from underneath and to look finer in texture. She had a clear and habitually unblemished complexion, which in those days was absolutely free from any kind of make-up. Many women of that time carried a chamois in their pockets which they passed over their noses to dull the

inevitable shine, but Lenzka had no need of this. Her broad nose was the same mat pallor as her whole face and body, the chief color in her face showing over her high cheekbones. Much of this recently acquired freshness came from walking in the cold; she had no money for carfare and Pizzetti insisted anyway that she walk everywhere she went, whenever possible. She kept this habit to the end of her life, and wore out the people who lived with her, dragging them on interminable daily walks.

Pizzetti loved her as he never loved anyone else in his life. But his was a religious love that made anything so commonplace as romance or physical attraction unthinkable. I doubt if the possibility more than occurred to him. He was seventeen years older than Lenzka, and he first saw her as a homely and awkward child, who had stirred in him emotions of pity and curiosity. As long as he knew her, and as fascinating as she became, he was never quite able to divorce her from the queer little Czech child that she was at heart. Later, as she developed, his whole feeling for her became responsibility to an ideal. With all his Italian intensity he believed that this was a God-given opportunity to become the instrument of a great creative accomplishment, and in bridging the span between his first interest in her and this ultimate exaltation, any chance of falling in love with her as a woman was lost. This was very fortunate. The best thing, aside from good grounding, that Pizzetti could give Lenzka was his dispassionate detachment, the good personal and musical judgment that enabled him to advise her correctly and to efface himself when her development indicated that he should. If he had been preoccupied with her personally, he could never have done what he did for her. He would probably have spoiled her career and her life.

And he was indeed shrewd in his plans. He had no strong

reason to believe that she would have a great voice, but he was superstitious and full of intuitions that he felt bound to follow. After she was settled in her job and her furnished room and her winter wardrobe, he had her come to his flat every week or so for a visit. He would cook supper for them—he loved to cook and I have never tasted the equal of his spaghetti. Strangely enough Lenzka could not cook a thing. You might think that with her background she would have had to, but her mother had evidently done all the cooking and taught her nothing; anyway she claimed she didn't know how to break an egg. But after their supper, with a little Chianti and some good cheese for dessert, Pizzetti would talk about operas and singing and great voices of the past and present. Lenzka would drink it in, her cheeks glowing and her eyes snapping with excitement. Sometimes he would analyze this or that performance of a great aria, and then wander over to the piano and play some of it to illustrate his points. He would watch Lenzka from the corner of his eye, and she would rise to her feet by instinct and mouth the thing through, silently, without realizing he was watching her. One evening they were talking about *Traviata*, with Pizzetti sitting at the piano. He began the introduction to *Ah fors' è lui che l'anima*, making comments about the Violetta he had heard the week before.

"She should have done it *this* way," he said, playing, and presently he found Lenzka standing at his elbow. Her lips were moving and her fingers clasped tight together. He looked over his shoulder and nodded his head.

"Come on, Lenzka," he said. He played with his left hand and beckoned her with a circling motion of his right arm. "Come on, sing."

She began, *piano*, with a smoothness that Pizzetti said made his insides melt. He thought she had probably never

seen the score. She had heard it in Prague and had recently heard him talk about the right way to sing it. How she knew the words he never stopped to think. Actually she had picked them up down on the East Side where everybody walked around singing Verdi arias. In the same way, as a child, she had picked up the German words of *Don Juan* in Prague. As time went on he was to marvel more and more at her extraordinary memory.

She sang through the first part; then at the change to F major she let out *A quell'amor*, in full voice, childishly unconscious of what she was doing, but standing like a statue with her head thrown back and her big chest expanded. Pizzetti said that something inside him curled like fire licking at a log. He said her voice was not so big, but alive and glowing with force that almost frightened him. Its quality was earthy. It gave the impression of a large voice, probably because it poured from such a magnificent throat, but actually it was small in proportion to the woman from whom it came. The Maestro was too pedagogic even then to be entirely carried away, and while she was still singing he had started planning how to train her. In a stream of imaginary pictures he saw all the rôles he would teach her, although he had then no presentiment of what she would finally become. To him she would be a high dramatic soprano, the greatest in the whole world. That ambition was enough for one evening!

When she finished he turned and held out his hands to her. She bent down and kissed him on the forehead; each of them knew what had taken place in the other's mind, but neither spoke of it. He did not tell her she was discovered, she did not speak of ambition. Instead he turned to the piano and gave her a chord.

"Sing me a scale, Lenzka," he said.

She giggled. "Maestro, I never sang a scale."

"Then you begin now. Scales all the time. Arpeggios. Turns. Trills like this." He played two notes, slowly, like a violinist practising. "Nothing faster than this. Hard work from now on, Lenzka, and no more arias for a long time."

As she was buttoning her gray jacket to leave, she looked at him seriously. "Maestro," she said, "you take this all for granted. Stop and think a moment. How can I have lessons? I have no money."

Pizzetti nodded. "I know that, Lenzka. Of course I shall teach you anyway."

"Ah, I knew you'd say that," she said, "but I can't let you do that. I can't let you give me lessons for nothing."

"You will have to," he said.

"Why?"

"Because you must have lessons. I won't let anyone else give them to you—nobody would, probably. I want to give you lessons."

"But when, Maestro? I can't stop work in the shop, can I?"

"No," he said, "and I could not teach you in the daytime when all my other pupils come—the fools who pay and have nothing for me to work with, most of them. You will have to come in the evenings, Lenzka, and on Sundays when we are free. We can manage that way. About twice a week."

So the lessons began. Those were the days of good old-fashioned *bel canto*, and Lenzka got the real thing from Pizzetti. He taught her breathing that carried three lines on a breath with plenty to spare, and it stayed with her all her life. She had a tremendous pair of lungs, although at that time they were still undeveloped. He taught her to sing square in the centre of every note, round and full from her stomach to the top of her skull. Nobody ever heard Lena

Geyer hoot or slide across the outside of a difficult tone. She went straight into it. Even in her *pianissimo*, and there has never been another like it, the same perfect roundness and richness were there, tempered by a beautiful muscular control that must have been the despair of her rivals. When it came to her full voice, there she showed that golden fire, the vibrance and physical solidity that made musicians always use a graphic and inelegant word about her. They said she thrilled their guts, and it was true, she did; everybody's. You listened to Geyer with everything from your ears to your sexual organs.

Of course this did not all come about at once. Just as she had matured slowly in other ways, the full power and meaning of her voice developed gradually, but with peculiar depth in each step. She was vitally in earnest about her work, and would practise one turn or phrase of three or four notes with dogged application that is common enough to pianists but extremely rare in singers. She had a great resource of self-discipline. Like her blind and exaggerated obedience to Pizzetti's early command not to sing at all, she could obey any other injunction that he gave her. He told her how and what to practise and she herself refused to look beyond her immediate job. Thus she never once, in a whole year of study, mentioned the opera, or appeared to be thinking of a career. It was enough that she was studying.

Sometimes Pizzetti would give her a pass to the Metropolitan that he had got from Ceccarini (who, by the way, had left Hammerstein and gone there). Lena would cut one item off her usual twenty-cent supper and use the nickel thus saved to ride down to the opera in the elevated. Generally she walked the two and a half miles home. A walk like that was nothing to her, especially when she was on fire with excitement. Sometimes the Maestro took her with

him. They would sit silent and fascinated, but at any mistake from a singer Lena would pluck his sleeve and indicate her criticism with her eyebrows. He would nod and wink at her.

He had begun to call her Lena; the smooth Italian came easier to him than her thick Czech name and the change seemed to please her. On the other hand, he could thank God for her Czech origins which made her voice unique in his experience. She was Slavic without the gloominess and remoteness of a Russian, but Slavic nevertheless, with the full earthiness and elemental motivation of the type. Then in her artistic conscience and enormous capacity for work she was German, and in her fiery brilliance more Latin than an Italian. She learned Italian so easily that Pizzetti thought it a miracle, but actually she was a born linguist and could learn any language in a few weeks, which she demonstrated later when she learned French and Spanish and Russian. At this time she spoke four languages equally well; Czech, German, English, and Italian, and sang in all of them at Pizzetti's insistence. Left to her own devices she would have confined herself to Italian but he would not allow this.

"Why?" she would ask him. "Why do you harp on German? You never cared for it yourself."

"No, but you'll see why some day," he said. This was only an instinct, a "hunch" with him. He knew almost nothing about Wagnerian music and German Lieder, but he was already aware of what lay dormant in Lena. His problem was what to do about it, ultimately. Just now it was enough to keep her at her classics and her *bel canto*.

One February night about a year after he had begun to teach her, he was having supper in his flat with Ceccarini and Giuseppe Lazzaro, a conductor from the Metropolitan, and Grau the director, who had invited himself. The doorbell

rang and Lena walked in. Pizzetti had forgotten to tell her to change her evening, and when the three men saw the big, handsome girl with a coal-scuttle hat on the front of her brown pompadour and her cheeks glowing from the cold, they raised their eyebrows and winked at Giulio and began to make knowing remarks. He was embarrassed, not at their implications, but because he had carefully kept Lena a secret from all of them, even from Ceccarini, planning to introduce her when he felt she was ready. But there was no escaping the men's ill-chosen jokes. Poor Lena stood in the doorway red with mortification, trying to make her escape, and Pizzetti raised his hand and told them to keep still.

"I don't mind if you make jokes at my expense," he said, "but please consider the young lady. She is no—no—friend of mine. She is a pupil."

"Oh," the men all said. They begged her pardon. Pizzetti indicated why she had come at such an unusual time and his guests turned to look at her with new interest. She made her excuses, very flustered. She told him she would come the next day, and started to leave.

"Wait a moment," Grau said, eyeing the girl with some interest. "Let's not drive the young lady away. Go ahead, Giulio, and give her her lesson. We'll sit here and drink our wine."

If Lena had not been a genius Pizzetti would never have listened to this suggestion, but as he looked at her standing in the doorway—her fine tall figure and the strong white throat of which he alone knew the secret—he could not resist the temptation to have her sing. He told her to go into the next room for her lesson, and after tossing off the rest of his wine, he arose and followed her. First they ran through some scales and exercises. Then he said to her quietly, "Lena, I want you to sing *Mi Tradi*."

She smiled in a scared way and whispered, "Now, Maestro? With strangers in there?"

He frowned at her. "Are you stupid?" he whispered.

She shook her head. "No," she said. "Play it."

As he began he remembered the Sunday in Prague nearly nine years before, when the unwashed and unprepossessing child had warbled the same thing. Now Lena had studied it; its intervals and difficult *legatos* flowed like spring water and her vocalizing was like pearls slipping through the fingers. Though he had heard her practise it only recently, Pizzetti said he was thrilled and proud enough to burst. If she could sing Mozart like that he knew she could sing anything. But what he did not expect was the terrific reaction upon his guests. As he finished and swung around on his piano stool he saw Ceccarini and Grau and Lazzaro standing in the doorway, gaping at Lena like three sheep.

"Where did you find it?" Ceccarini asked, with his pop-eyes swimming.

"In Prague, you fool," Pizzetti said, "long before we left there."

Ceccarini sat down heavily and scratched his bald head. "For God's sake tell her to sing some more. Some Verdi."

Maestro smiled at Lena. They both knew what to do. When she finished *Ah fors' è lui* Ceccarini pulled out a handkerchief and rubbed his whole head and face with it several times. Grau had seated himself in a chair near by and was looking serious. But Giuseppe Lazzaro trotted across the room and pushed Pizzetti off the piano stool.

"You're a fine teacher, Giulio," he said, "but let me play for her. Do you know *Aïda*?" he asked Lena. (The conversation was in Italian.)

"*Sì, signor,*" she said.

They did half of the last act. By this time Maestro saw

that Lena was growing very tired; she had of course had no supper, expecting her lesson, and the audition that she did not realize she was giving (for she had no idea who Grau and Lazzaro were) was growing too long. So Pizzetti told her to go inside and eat some supper. Grau and Lazzaro followed her to the table and sat down. They looked at each other and Grau said, "Miss—Miss Lena, will you come down and see me at my office tomorrow morning?"

Lena looked at Pizzetti questioningly. He nodded.

"Yes," she said. "I'll come. Where is your office?"

"Thirty-ninth Street," Grau said. "Thirty-ninth Street and Broadway."

Chapter Four

It must not be thought that Lena had attained the Metropolitan in a miracle of a moment. On the contrary, she was given the merest toehold on the bottom rung of the ladder. She had as yet had no stage training whatever. She knew nothing about acting, had no technical knowledge of opera. All she could do was sing. Ceccarini had needed only a moment to sense her talent, and to tell Grau that she was wonderful material, ripe for dramatic teaching. He proposed to give it to her while she was getting the rest of her groundwork at the opera. She had not only never been on a stage or sung at an ordinary distance from her listeners; she had never sung with anyone, and had never been heard by anyone until that evening at Pizzetti's flat. Only the amazing beauty of her voice and the thorough excellence of her singing could have persuaded Grau to take an interest in her. Anyone equally inexperienced, with a less wonderful voice, would have been told to go away and study somewhere for two years, and then try again.

Maurice Grau and Lena had one thing in common; they were both born in Bohemia and brought to this country as children. But Lena was a Czech from Prague; Grau was an Austrian German, born in Brünn, now Brno, the town the world's best cooks are said to come from. By the time Lena met him, Grau was entirely an American, educated at C.C.N.Y. and the Columbia Law School. And consequently the remote connection between them meant very little to him. When Lena entered his office he was almost as impersonal

as if he had never seen her; she was simply material, something with a good voice and a lot to learn. For such a beginner even to be considered by Grau was remarkable. At this time his company comprised the greatest singers of the fabulous "Golden Age of Song"—Melba, Eames, Nordica, Calvé, the deReszkes, Maurel, Plançon, Salignac, Lassalle—such artists were his standbys. His public expected and received all-star casts that have never been matched in numbers and quality. He used his singers so lavishly that he alternated Melba and Eames as Micaela when Calvé sang *Carmen*. There was no room for an untrained girl in such a company, but there were innumerable bits that a superlative young singer could fill. Grau knew that Lena was such a singer, and so long as he need not disappoint his public by featuring her in place of any of his great stars, he was willing to be persuaded by Ceccarini that she might be useful.

Lena had arrived at his office promptly at nine-thirty, and without any preliminary discussion Grau handed her a paper and told her to sign it on the line he indicated. She was much too excited to read it. It was a contract for the remainder of the current season and for all of the following one, at forty dollars a week. Lena took the pen Grau handed her and was about to sign when he suddenly said, "Wait a minute! My God, girl, nobody knows your name." He scanned the contract. "They've left blanks here for it. What is your name?"

"Lenzka Gyruzskova."

"*What?*" Grau might have expected some such patronymic, but this tongue-twister almost brought him out of the chair.

Lena repeated her name. Grau sat back and groaned. He looked at Ceccarini who was sitting there laughing.

"I told you she was Bohemian, Direttore," he said.

"All right," Grau grumbled, "all right, she can be a Czech but she'll have to do something about that name. Good God, can you see it on a programme? Or pronounce it?"

"She'll have to change it," Ceccarini said helpfully.

"Certainly she will," Grau said. "Let's change it right now. Your first name's all right, what is it Pizzetti calls you?—Lena?"

"Yes, Direttore."

"Very well—Lena, that will do. Now this last name—" He shook his head. "Say it again."

"Gyruzkova," Lena said.

"Write it down."

She wrote it down. Grau took the paper and studied it; then he crossed out most of the letters. "The first three letters are all right," he said. "That would be G-Y-R, not quite a name." He looked at the letters for a moment. Then he made two E's, one on either side of the Y. He held up the paper and looked at it again, wagging his head from side to side. Then he handed it to Ceccarini.

"There you are," he said. "That's a good name. No special nationality, slightly German, you wouldn't give this girl an Italian name anyhow. Lena Geyer. Good name, hanh?"

Lena had been standing beside him quietly. He looked up at her and said, "You like it?"

She shrugged. "All right, Direttore, if you say so. Anything you please."

Grau took his pen and wrote Lena Geyer in the blanks on the contract. Then he handed it to her and showed her where to sign. He watched her. "Don't make a mistake," he said, "that's your name now."

Lena signed. Grau took the paper, blotted it, shoved it into a pigeonhole in his desk, and terminated the interview

with a wave of his hand. Lena hesitated a moment. He looked up at her impatiently. "Well, what is it?"

She bit her lip. "Please," she said hesitantly, "what do I do now?"

He made an impatient gesture. "You go home and wait for Maestro Ceccarini to send for you. Good morning."

Thus she began. Yet it was not so much the beginning of a career as the beginning of a new stage in her education. Her lessons with Pizzetti continued just the same; he made her come every Sunday for work on special parts and for polishing fine points. Because he was so intimate with Ceccarini they took a mutual interest in her training, and Ceccarini usually consulted Pizzetti before giving Lena a part to study. All her parts were bits. She appeared once or twice a week in performances, and nearly every day in one rehearsal or another. Ceccarini soon discovered that she was willing to do anything he asked of her; to fill in for absent singers at rehearsals, to cue people, to understudy. Though forty dollars a week was fantastic wealth to her, she lived exactly as she had always lived, walking either to or from the opera house each time she went there, eating the cheapest and plainest food, dressing herself in remnants and bargain-sale items. She sent money to her mother once a month. Her only indulgence after receiving her first week's salary was to buy as many second-hand opera scores as she could, and she continued buying until she had all the Italian and French scores in the current repertoire at the opera. Pizzetti approved of this but told her she must also get a piano into her room. The next major expenditure from her salary therefore, was five dollars a month rental for an upright piano, but as it had been impossible to get it into her little top-floor cubbyhole, she had to move two flights

down to a room through whose window a piano could be hoisted. This cost her more money and she was panic-stricken. Pizzetti had already given her the most earnest exhortation to save her money, and she put it penny by penny into a savings-bank. She took it for granted, with the hard providence of a peasant, that money was meant to be saved, but she did not know Pizzetti's real reason for telling her to do it. Once she tried to give him some of it, dwelling on her debt to him, but he laughed at her.

"Put it in the bank, Lena," he said. "Some day you will have money enough to give me anything you like. But this money you must keep where you'll have it when you want it."

Ceccarini began to give Pizzetti ecstatic reports of her progress in acting. He had seen at once—anybody could always see—that Lena had temperament. This word has been so misused that I dislike applying it to Lena, but it is a quality she had to a supreme degree, and something not so common as the prevalence of the term would lead you to believe. By temperament Ceccarini meant the thing that happened to Lena like the switching on of an electric current, the moment she walked onto the stage. He used to love to watch her at rehearsals. No matter how small her part, she would take possession of it, or let it absorb her, so utterly that she automatically created perfect illusion. In a starched white shirtwaist and a swishing cloth skirt, with her brown hair ratted up high in the pompadour then the fashion, she would move about the stage in the wake of the great stars, not infrequently (Ceccarini said) blanking them out. She had no idea of the effect she created, although the stars did. Finding themselves face to face with the maid or younger sister or soubrette or whatever minor character she was playing, they would study her movements and listen to her voice

with visible emotions ranging from astonishment to alarm. But since she was, after all, an obscure little New York immigrant securely tied in a picayune contract to minor rôles, they dismissed her easily without resorting to the jealous cabals with which they would have defended themselves against some one of more importance. Lena was thoroughly insignificant and everyone was satisfied—even Lena herself. She had a peculiar sort of innocence, a childish will to believe that everything was just and right, and that she was getting her fair deserts.

In the season of 1896-1897 she sang in the complete Italian and French repertoire at the Metropolitan, always of course minor rôles, bits, and even walk-ons. Ceccarini soon found that she learned not only her own part in a score, but the whole score, a piece of enterprise he could hardly believe. Lena used to go to the opera house without being summoned regardless of what was being rehearsed. She knew she could learn more from watching rehearsals than from staying at home studying her own bits, so she was always to be found in a corner, intent with her score in her lap. More than once Ceccarini caught her cuing a singer who had missed.

As for Giuseppe Lazzaro, the wiry little conductor, he was delighted with her. When she was on the stage he would point up the music to her—so much so as once to cause Madame Rinaldi, his acknowledged inamorata, to make a scandalous scene before the whole company. Lazzaro ended by spitting in the lady's face and walking out of the rehearsal. And he made secret plans for Lena. Under his leadership, he thought, it would be only a few weeks before she would be singing Violetta, Carmen, Donna Elvira, and half a dozen other star rôles, and probably he could have brought this to pass in the face of all opposition, had Lena been willing to pay his price. She was not, of course, un-

sophisticated, but in defending herself against the director's advances she gave a fine imitation of being so. Lazzaro tried two or three times to bring matters to the point, and each time ran into mountainous obtuseness, ineptitude, and Slavic passivity. This was all the more exasperating because, the minute after staring at him like a stupid servant girl, she would come on the stage with a light in her green eyes and a mobility in her big features that drove him almost crazy. He knew better than to try to seduce her by force; it was not his way, he was a subtle creature; and besides Lena was about twice his size. He was such a little man that he had to stand on an extra-high podium to be seen from the stage, while Lena was fully a head taller, calm and strong, with magnificent muscular development and bones as big and square as a man's.

After a few weeks he gave up in disgust and pointedly let her alone. The public indication of this was sudden cessation of any further efforts to get good parts for her. He ignored her existence, accepting her like a piece of furniture and paying her no more attention than was absolutely necessary. He was too good a musician not to include her, musically, to the fullest extent in all his performances, but he managed to convey to her that she was just another instrument to him, a necessity like a 'cello or a piece of scenery, nothing more.

Lena accepted this too in her stride. She and Pizzetti talked about it together, giggling over their spaghetti like two children. He was pleased with her behavior. Not from motives of morality, not Pizzetti, but as he said to Lena——

"Some women would have to make love with Lazzaro to get to the top. But not you, Lena. You will arrive on your own two feet, with your own good voice and talent. That is the woman you are. Afterward, if you want to live with

Lazzaro, or anybody else—" he shrugged and spread his hands.

Because she had had Italian training and was identified with the Italian contingent of the company, nobody thought of Lena for anything except Italian and French rôles. She sang bits in about fifteen operas, including *Carmen*, *Mefistofele*, *La Favorita*, *Martha*, *Faust*, *Romeo et Juliette*, *Les Huguenots*, *L'Africaine*, *Trovatore*, *Cavalleria*, *Le Cid*, and others. Sometimes if the opera contained a chorus but no small solo part for her, she would ask Ceccarini to let her go on in the chorus, just to get the feel of the score in performance. She had an absolute disregard of how much work she did. All her life she had tremendous energy, but in those days she overflowed with it. She could rehearse all day and sing in a performance at night, and be at Pizzetti's for a lesson at seven-thirty the next morning, and then on to rehearsal and so on at a rate that would have prostrated the average woman. She still did all her own washing and ironing, walked about four miles a day, and ate sparingly, not from asceticism but from economy. She could eat a man's meal if she had the chance, but not unless it was given to her. Like all peasants she lived chiefly on bread, and used to keep a huge round loaf of black bread in her room on top of the piano. As soon as she finished practising she would tear a hunk off the loaf and sit down and eat it, dry, without butter, while she studied stage business and the words of her scores.

In her later years, when I knew Lena, and all during the height of her career, she was full of animation and mischief. She used to be like a big, jolly breeze, and she was childishly delighted with jokes and pranks and nonsense. She relished her leisure hours as keenly as if she could taste them, like the food and wine she loved. But in her early

working days there were few signs of this gaiety and playfulness. Her first experiences in America had obliterated such tendencies, and when she began to sing she abandoned herself to her work in grim earnest. Maestro Pizzetti believed that half her success, and most of her amazing staying power, lay in her capacity for self-discipline. "Lena is wonderful company now," he said to me once when we were all having supper together and Lena had convulsed us with her imitations of two newly imported hams at the opera, "but you should have seen her when she was young. *Dio mio*, she was a tiger, so fierce in her work. Such a life she made for herself—*senza gioia, senza amore*. Nothing but work, all day, all night. She used to live in the opera house."

It was during that period that Lena went down one day to the opera house to a rehearsal, as she thought, of *Les Huguenots*, but found that she had made a mistake and that they were rehearsing *Die Walküre* instead. Ceccarini had nothing to do with Wagner, and was not present. Heinrich Herrmann, the German stage-director, was in charge.

The rehearsal was going badly and Herrmann was in a temper, wiping the sweat off his cropped head and running about with his shirt plastered to his shoulders. The troupe of Valkyries was particularly bad, so bad that Lena, more from malicious curiosity than anything else, stayed to listen to them getting scolded. Most of them, like Grau's chorus singers, were Italian, and had no Wagnerian training at all. Then the Sieglinde had a cold and could not sing above a whisper, and the Brünnhilde had a voice like a foghorn. But the orchestra was not so bad and Lena found herself listening with awe to the stirring music. This was her introduction to a Ring opera—*Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* she had heard during the winter. She had not dreamt of singing in any of them.

One of the Valkyries, however, now unwittingly opened up a whole new vista in Lena's life. The unfortunate girl faulted on the same passage three times in succession. The very insignificance of her part made the mistake seem all the worse, and Herrmann turned on her in a rage.

"Get out of here, you washwoman!" he shouted in German. "Get off the stage and stay off!"

There was some confusion while the hysterical girl was hustled away. Herrmann stood in the middle of the stage scratching his head and puzzled. What to do for a Valkyr? Then he saw Lena sitting in a corner.

"Who's that?" he roared.

One of the orchestra men told him she was a bit-player of Italian rôles.

"What's your name?"

"Lena Geyer," she said.

"Italian?"

Lena got up and walked toward him. "*Nein,*" she said, "*aber hier singe ich nur Italienischen Rollen.*"

He took a good look at her and let out a rich string of Prussian oaths. "Take off your hat," he said, "and get over there with those girls."

"But *Herr Direktor,*" Lena said, "I don't know *Die Walküre*. I've never studied it."

He scowled at her. "No? Well go home and learn this"—he ruffed through the Valkyries' pages—"and come back at nine tomorrow morning."

He turned back to the *mêlée* on the stage and Lena started home with his score under her arm. But on the way she stopped at Pizzetti's and told him what had happened. He grinned at her.

"Aren't you surprised, Maestro?" she asked.

"Not in the least," he said. "This was bound to happen

any time, but what could I do about it? I don't know how to teach you Wagner."

"Then how shall I learn it?" she asked, turning pale. "I can't bungle through it. I must learn it right."

"Lena," Pizzetti said. "Don't have such a childish estimation of yourself. After all, this is a little part. A bit, like all the things you've been doing this winter. Just—learn it."

"Yes, that's all very well, Maestro," she said, "but Wagner! *Wagner*——"

Pizzetti said it was interesting to see this happening to Lena. In a matter of a few moments she was changing from the girl he had trained to sing florid Italian rôles to the earnest worshipper of Wagner that her very physique had long suggested to him.

"Don't bother about how to sing it, Lena," he said. "Just learn the notes and follow the directions in the score and Herrmann will give you tips; he's very good."

"Very well, Maestro," she said. "Will you come to the performance?"

He pinched her cheek. "To hear my Lena sing with a dozen other crows so I can't hear her? Oh, I suppose I'll be there."

He was there. Lena's part was of course too small for her to be noticed apart from the others. But Pizzetti studied her on the stage, everything from her big, balanced frame in the corselet and helmet of the Valkyr, which became her marvellously, to her singing which, just because it was hers, rang out for him above everything else in the performance. Once he said he caught her during the action looking at the blundering Brünnhilde with such a transparent expression of scorn that he was embarrassed. And that glance from her gave him the final clue he had been groping for. He knew then what she must do next, and the knowledge gave him a

twinge of heartache, even of jealousy. In a sense he must lose her, pass her on to the fulfillment of a greater destiny than he could have planned for her. But it was a long way off, he felt; Lena's voice was increasing in breadth and size, but was still too light for Wagner heroines.

After Herrmann discovered her she worked harder than ever. Ceccarini was furious and threatened to leave her out of his casts altogether. "Is she a singer," he snapped at Pizzetti, "or is she a German cow?"

"You make me tired," Pizzetti said. "You know as well as I do what she is, don't you?" He stared at Ceccarini. Pietro's eyes bulged with contrition. "Yes," he said quietly. "I know what she is and the time is not so far away, either."

Herrmann had Lena prepare the rôle of Freya, in *Das Rheingold*, but no performance was given that season. She learned two lyric rôles, the Shepherd in *Tannhäuser* and the Bird in *Siegfried*, both of which she sang beautifully in rehearsal, but she was given no chance to sing them in performances. If Italian parts came to her easily, German ones seemed to fit like her skin. One day Herrmann told her to study Venus, just for the experience. She learned the music overnight and he called her to rehearsal as understudy. The part lay low for her voice, which was a Godsend for her development. Lena discovered that in spite of her normal range, easily compassing D, she enjoyed singing in the low register. She had almost a contralto range; its quality, all in her chest, was thrilling beyond description. In some ways her low voice was more thrilling than her fiery middle and high one, and in later days the critics used to go wild looking for terms in which to describe it. It was pure earth, female, sex if you want to call it that. You might say that where her high tones were enchanting to the imagination, her low ones warmed the body like an embrace.

She became so interested in her new vocal exercise that she learned the part of Ortrud in *Lohengrin* just for the practice, and surprised Herrmann at a rehearsal by offering to fill in when the mezzo-soprano was late. Afterward he took her to Lüchow's for a glass of beer, the first such attention any one at the opera house had paid her. Beer was a tremendous treat for Lena. She drank red wine when she ate with Pizzetti and nothing but water when she ate alone, because she was so frugal. Later, when she made money, she drank only the finest vintage wines for special occasions, never ordinary table wine. She preferred beer for a daily beverage.

Herrmann did some straight talking. He asked her if she knew just where she was heading, and wherein she was wasting her time at the Metropolitan. She told him she realized that she was cut out for bigger things but that she had a horror of pushing herself and wanted to grow into her stride. She told him some outlines of her history, including the years when she had never sung at all. Herrmann conceded that this was probably a piece of great wisdom on Pizzetti's part, but thought that the delay had been inadvertently too long and she should now catch up as quickly as possible. When she asked him what he meant, he said that she ought to go to Germany and begin there as an unknown in an opera house like Stuttgart or Frankfort; with her genius she would soon be noticed all over the country and quickly become recognized in Europe. Which, they both knew well, was the prerequisite for real stature at the Metropolitan. Though he was too thorough an artist to deny the importance of her Italian and French capabilities, Herrmann—and Lena too—already tacitly assumed that her real future lay in Wagnerian rôles. He told her frankly that he could see no reason why she should not be successful with anything she cared to undertake after her voice reached its full size.

What she had, he told her, was a pair of voices, not only in quality but in versatility. If she preferred to go to Italy and make her start there—he shrugged. But Lena did not need to tell him she believed Germany her natural destination.

After this conversation with Herrmann, she talked with Pizzetti, somewhat hesitantly, as if she expected him to be disappointed. These plans for a career in German music seemed traitorous to her Italian training and her Maestro. But Pizzetti relieved her about that. "Only a fool, and a particularly tasteless one," he told her, "could fail to realize that German music is the height of all creative accomplishment. Naturally I love my Verdi, my Bellini, my *bel canto*. You should never stop singing them, for your own sake as well as for your public. They will keep you tender and feminine and endear you to half a world that you might otherwise not appeal to. But Lena, God makes voices like yours for the greatest music in the world. Mozart and Beethoven and Wagner wrote for you."

Lena sat thoughtful for a time. Then she asked Pizzetti if he thought Herrmann's idea was the right one for her.

He answered slowly. "Yes," he said, "Herrmann's plan is very good. He has your future in mind and you will get the grounding you need that way. But I have a better idea still."

"What, Maestro?"

"You need more teaching," Pizzetti said. "You can sing well enough to go onto any German stage and be taught the incidentals of your parts by the conductors and directors. But I want something better for you. I want you to get your German teaching from headquarters. From Lilli Lehmann."

Lena's eyes grew round with awe and she clapped her hand over her mouth. The name of Lilli Lehmann was like a reli-

gious invocation. Lena could not take it for granted that Lilli Lehmann was then prepared to teach any worthwhile pupil who came to her; that she was a perfectly accessible, if very great woman. To Lena she was a goddess; the idea of ever speaking to her was too much for such childlike humility. Pizzetti smiled at her. "You are a baby, aren't you?" he said.

Lena blushed. "I suppose so, Maestro. I couldn't even sing for Lilli Lehmann. I'd die of fright."

"No, you wouldn't. I've never spoken to her, only seen her on the stage. But she's the kind of a woman I want you to know. She will give you everything I haven't been able to give."

"Is there so very much of that, Maestro?" Lena asked.

He nodded slowly. "Yes, a great deal. Quite aside from what she can teach you, she will inspire you. You have to be inspired for your biggest work, Lena. Some day you will meet a conductor, or another singer, somebody who will put you on fire every time you sing. You inspire yourself pretty well now. God knows you make most other women on the stage look like chambermaids. But Lehmann I think will lift you to your real level. You don't know what that is yet."

Lena brought up the next and foremost question in her mind.

"What about money?"

"I've been thinking of that for a long time," Pizzetti said. "That's why I've been telling you to save your pay. How much have you in the bank?"

"About three hundred dollars."

Pizzetti smiled. "Of course that won't get you anywhere. But in case of trouble, if anything happened to you, it would at least bring you back here. I don't want you to be stranded in Europe. However—we must raise a good sum of money."

"How much?" Lena asked. She was appalled at the idea of borrowing a cent. "And where?"

"I think I know where," he said. "You will need about two thousand dollars. Some for travelling expenses, some for living in Berlin, some for your lessons. I know someone who will lend you two thousand dollars."

Lena turned pale with fright. "I couldn't," she stammered. "I couldn't take it. Why—I'd never be able to pay it back."

Pizzetti got up and put his hand under her chin and looked into her big eyes for a moment. "My child," he said, "the day is coming when two thousand dollars will be two hours' pay for you. Don't think of your work in terms of money. But don't worry about it either. You have nothing to worry about."

It was characteristic of Giulio Pizzetti that he had actually sought out a loan for Lena and made tentative arrangements for her before he spoke to her about it. He had a friend who was one of the steady habitués of the opera, a man from Bologna whom he had known since boyhood. This man had been in America for twenty years and had grown rich in the olive oil and cheese importing business. His passion was opera. He went three or four nights a week and knew all the Italian scores so thoroughly he could sing them straight through. When he heard Lena sing he went to Pizzetti gasping like a fish and red in the face with excitement. He embraced and kissed Giulio and almost knocked him down with his vehemence. Pizzetti enjoyed the demonstration, for the man really did know voices. Thereafter Signor Lucarelli never failed to hear her sing, and Pizzetti encouraged him in his interest. And it was to him the Maestro now turned.

There was, however, one difficulty; Lucarelli would gladly have given five thousand dollars to send Lena to Milan, but

it was extremely doubtful if he would lend two thousand to send her to Germany. Pizzetti got round this obstacle deviously. There was no use trying to convince Lucarelli that studying Wagner was more important to Lena at that time than singing Verdi. He took the other tack and argued to Lucarelli that since Lena was already trained to sing Italian opera with the best of them, he felt it imperative that she should get the best German training too. She should be finished, an all-round artist. Oh, probably, Pizzetti said with a wave of his hand, she'd never bother to sing Wagner, you know—it was just a question of training. And when Lucarelli demurred and said no training was any better than Pizzetti's, Maestro bowed from the waist but assured him that Lilli Lehmann's would be much better. Even if it were not better, he said craftily, Lilli Lehmann was the greatest singer in the world and association with her would give Lena the final lustre she really ought to have. This won the day. Lucarelli was a good business man and appreciated the power of advertising. So he agreed to lend Pizzetti two thousand dollars for Lena, and wanted one thing in return in addition to his six per cent. He wanted to meet Lena just once before she went away, so that he would be able to say he had known her before she was world-famous. This Pizzetti promised.

Toward the end of her second season in bits at the Metropolitan, in the spring of 1897, Lena and Herrmann came to Pizzetti's flat one Sunday evening to talk things over. Herrmann said immediately that a year of study with Lehmann would be priceless for Lena. He agreed to arrange, through his friends in Berlin, for Lena to go to Lehmann for an audition as soon as she arrived there; the question of lessons would take care of itself after that. He would write Frau Kalisch-Lehmann himself, of course, but he assured them

that personal recommendations with such a woman were just a triviality. "She'll look at Lena, and listen to her," he said, "and give her her best. She'd do the same if nobody had ever mentioned the name Geyer to her." Then he looked curiously at Pizzetti and suddenly inquired with characteristic bluntness why an Italian, probably jealous and chauvinistic by nature, and presumably absorbed in the girl, should have gone to such lengths to further her career when it meant effacing himself. Was not he in love with the girl?—if not, why not?

Pizzetti pressed Herrmann's hand and looked at Lena, who was in the next room taking the supper dishes off the table.

"I love her so much," Pizzetti said, "that I can see only my ideal in her. There's no place for me in the life of a woman like that. I've had enough from her already to keep me happy and proud the rest of my life. She has to go on further now, and I am content to stay behind. She won't forget me, Herrmann. She loves me. I'm the only father she has ever known."

All the arrangements were made for Lena to leave for Berlin the week after the opera closed. With a few casual words of praise and rather patronizing assurance of better parts, Grau had offered to renew her contract for another two years at a small raise in salary. She thanked him and refused. He asked why. She told him she was going to Germany to study. She did not mention Lehmann. But he did. He snapped it out from the corner of his mouth, without looking up from his desk. "Lehmann?"

Lena showed her surprise. "How did you know?" she asked.

Grau turned around in his chair and looked at her. "For God's sake," he shouted, "did you think I was a jackass?"

In the midst of all these arrangements, Marta died on the farm in the Catskills. She was buried in the Catholic churchyard in the village, almost as appropriately, Lena said, as if she had been taken back to the Bohemian hamlet where she was born. At the funeral Pizzetti realized for the first time that Lena was a Catholic. He could not feel any grief for her loss, for Marta had at last become quite feeble-witted and could never have been anything but a burden; but he was surprised at the effect of the funeral on Lena. It seemed to throw her back into her childhood, and for weeks afterward, while she was preparing to sail for Germany, she was unusually serious and remote. She was not in the habit of going to church, and Pizzetti, himself as agnostic as most musicians, had gathered that her aversion to priests was somehow connected with her hideous early experiences in New York. (She had not allowed a priest to come near her when she was in Bellevue.) But her mother's death seemed to have evoked emotions from a remote past, and he was amazed, the night before she sailed, to have her ask him if he would go to Mass with her, the next morning. He agreed and they chose a little neighborhood church. Out of the corner of his eye Pizzetti could see Lena attending to the service seriously, though he could only guess what was transpiring behind her calm. As they came out, she said, "Maestro, I have so much to be thankful for that I cannot express my thanks to you. So I had to try to thank God."

They went to his flat for breakfast, both pretending that this was a gala hour. Maestro made the coffee and Lena whipped cream—a taste from her Prague childhood that she had been able to indulge perhaps four times in her life—and put the fresh crusty Italian bread and sweet butter on the table. After they were seated, Lena started to pour out the coffee, but the pot shook in her hand and she set it down

quickly. She looked at Pizzetti a moment, her broad high-boned face serious and drawn with emotion. Her wide mouth was curved downward, her eyes began to swim. Pizzetti had seen her weep as a grown woman only once before—when she saw him in the hospital. Now a sob burst from her throat more electrifying, he said, and more unforgettable than any sound he ever heard her make. She dropped her head in her folded arms on the table and wept bitterly.

There was something unapproachable about Lena's grief. She was not a girl you could take in your arms and comfort. When she experienced a serious emotion you felt you had to stand aside and let her go into it, profoundly and entirely. She was a woman of enormous, deep-lying emotional stature, and when her feelings rose from her profound control to rare expression, you saw something awe-inspiring like an Atlantic storm. Pizzetti did not move from his chair. He sat still, aching with his own intense grief and burning with love for this girl who had grown in his hands to the complete expression of everything he treasured most. He was too moved to make a sound.

Presently she looked up, her face calm and poised again. She dried her eyes with a fresh handkerchief that she took from her belt. Pizzetti said he had a passing thought of the trivial sort that crosses our minds in some of our most serious moments. He had a sudden picture of Lena, up late the night before, washing and ironing her modest supply of linen; and he said to himself, "When you come back you won't be doing laundry in a boarding-house basement!"

But they said little during breakfast. Pizzetti made sure she had her cash in an old-fashioned money-pocket under her skirt; he looked once more at her steamship ticket, her traveller's checks, her letters of introduction. Then he looked at his watch. It was time to leave for Hoboken. Lena had

sent her luggage over the day before in an express wagon, and they rode down on the elevated to the ferry. Going across the river Lena slipped her hand through his arm and stood looking straight ahead, with the wind blowing her skirts back against her strong limbs, and her veil fluttering behind her. Her eyes were shining.

She had a second-class passage on the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*, in a four-berth cabin with two travelling companions. Her luggage consisted of two cheap portmanteaux—one filled with winter clothes, she told Maestro, and the other with summer clothes and scores. That was all. She had no operative paraphernalia. Pizzetti would remember this in later years when he went to ships to meet her, and watch her maid Dora superintend the disposition of a vanload of trunks, marked L. G.—one, two, three, four, up to ten or twelve.

In her cabin they found a huge bunch of roses, of all colors, tied with two ribbons—one red, white, and blue, one black, white, and red. This was from Herrmann, with appropriate German sentiments. Lena smiled wanly. As the time drew near for Pizzetti to leave she seemed to shrink in size until he could hardly find his big, glowing Lena in this pale and silent girl. But presently they heard the gong ringing in the halls, and the steward intoning, "*Absteigen! Bitte Absteigen!*" Lena accompanied Pizzetti to the deck, and when he took off his hat to kiss her she put her hands on either side of his face and looked into his eyes. "*Addio, Maestro,*" she said firmly. "I will make you proud of Lena."

"I *am* proud of Lenä," he said. "God bless you. Will you write your Maestro?"

She nodded. "I never had anyone to write to," she said. "But I'll begin with you."

"Tell me all about your lessons," he said.

"I will. And Maestro—be happy!"

He looked back over his shoulder as he was going down the gangplank. She stood with one arm raised and her handkerchief fluttering. He turned and ran suddenly; that was when he cried.

Chapter Five

"THE FIRST TIME I saw Lilli Lehmann," Lena told me, "was when I rang the doorbell of her villa at Grunewald. It had been arranged by letter that I was to sing for her, and for the only time in my life that I remember, I was shaking with fright. The door was opened by a tall, severe-looking woman in a plain morning dress and a black silk apron. There was a fat brown dachshund barking at her heels. Now I knew that that was Lilli Lehmann, David—you could not have missed that personality even if you hadn't known her face. But I was so terrified that I stood there like a housemaid applying for a job and stammered, 'Is Frau Lehmann at home?' She looked at me for a moment and let me get thoroughly confused; I suppose I was blushing, too. Then she laughed and said, 'So you are the young Geyer. Come in and let me look at you.'

"She told me to take off my hat and jacket and sit down. Of course she asked me all the usual questions—what experience I had had, what Maestro Pizzetti's methods were, what I knew about stage deportment, what languages I knew, what people I had sung with, how old I was, and many other personal questions. All this time I felt like a clumsy schoolgirl, but after the catechism she leaned forward and looked me square in the eye and said, 'Are you serious?' I think she must have imagined what my voice was like, otherwise she would never have bothered to speak to me that way. I said yes, I was absolutely serious. 'Ready for

anything?" she asked me. "Ready to give up everything else in the world?"

"I have nothing else," I answered.

"Good," she said, and went over to the piano. "Now sing me these arpeggios."

"I sang what she wanted, and several arias, and she listened very carefully. I could see she thought I had been well trained—once in a while she would wait for some tricky place and then nod very slowly when I had sung it. Of course as soon as I began to sing I forgot all about being nervous and frightened. She noticed that, and was pleased. And, of course, she criticized too. But she did approve of my phrasing and breathing and tessitura, and she was pleased with my *sostenuto*, and she liked the way I sang Mozart. So my lessons began immediately—that was in June, 1897.

"I rented a cheap room with a clerk's family not far from Frau Lilli's house, and I used to walk over for my lesson every morning at eight o'clock. Think of that—in these days a singer who was up and dressed and working at eight in the morning would be considered a freak! Each lesson was supposed to last an hour, but if Frau Lilli had no other engagement she kept me right on, sometimes all morning. Her energy was astounding. I've always had plenty myself, but I was feeble compared with her. I'd be exhausted long before she even thought of stopping. She'd work on some long, difficult score for a couple of hours, shaping every phrase and note to her idea of perfection, teaching me diction and deportment and stage-bearing as well as music, and when I was ready to drop from fatigue she'd jump up and start to sing *Casta Diva* or the *Liebestod*, just, for the pleasure of it. Of course she was teaching me by example, but she had no idea that I should think yet of *Tristan* or

Norma. She said I must grow into them slowly, but there was no harm in showing me toward what I was working. And she simply loved to sing these arias. She was the incarnation of song. It was nothing for her to toss off a few of them every day.

"At this time she was fifty years old, David, and she was still singing without a thought of retiring. She taught just because she loved to—she was so enthusiastic about her art that she longed to find voices to train that would carry it on. But it wasn't only her energy that was so impressive—it was the whole woman, as an artist and a person. Of course vocally she was absolutely phenomenal, in a class by herself. She not only sang the most terrific dramatic arias as easily as tossing something over her shoulder, but you realize she was one of the great coloraturas of history. Her technique bowled me over, and it was one of those honest-to-God techniques that stays by a singer for good. When she was fifty-eight she sang *Martern aller Arten* like a young woman, and you know what that is—probably the meanest and hardest thing ever written."

Maestro Pizzetti had been right when he told Lena that Lilli Lehmann would inspire her and set her greatest ambitions afire. Lena loved to watch Frau Lilli while she talked. Lehmann had—an unusual feature for a singer—a fine, small head with closely-coiffed graying hair, and brilliant dark eyes that snapped and sparkled with every word and gesture. Her nose was high-bridged and aquiline, her bearing imposing and queenly. Yet she had a side so simple, so natural and delicious, that she drew from Lena the human devotion which she, in her awe of the great woman, had not expected to feel. And her reminiscences were absorbing. Lena loved to listen to accounts of the great perform-

ances in which her teacher had sung. Lehmann was a mine of anecdotes and stories of the most extraordinary career in operatic history, which had begun in Prague when she was a girl of sixteen, singing the highest coloratura rôles, and continued to the present, when she was considered the greatest Norma, Fidelio, and Isolde.

Lena loved to hear about the early days at Bayreuth when Wagner, who was devoted to Lilli Lehmann, had directed every detail of his first *Ring*. And she loved to hear about the triumphs in the great opera houses of Europe, the royal houses of Berlin, Dresden, Vienna, Stockholm, and London; and about singing under the great conductors without whom opera could not be.

But best of all Lena loved her teacher's stories of America, of the days fifteen years before when she had gone to New York to sing the first Wagner in the newly built Metropolitan, and to follow up these triumphs with a tour all the way to the Pacific Coast when such travelling took real temerity. Lilli Lehmann loved America, and had many loyal friends there; she assured Lena that nowhere on earth could audiences be more rewarding or more loyal. Lena listened to this with sparkling eyes and heightened color; Lehmann's words seemed like a shining path that she would always strive to follow.

In July, Lilli Lehmann went to her summer home at Scharfling, on the beautiful Mondsee, one of the jewel-like lakes in the Salzkammergut. This spot was a five hours' drive by carriage from Salzburg, where Frau Lehmann was already laying the foundation for the Mozart festivals she inaugurated shortly afterward. She had Lena go with her to Austria, and take a tiny room in the garret of a *Landhaus* close by her own. The lessons continued, now almost daily, but they were interspersed with many pleasures that Lena

had never known before. Frau Lehmann had the village dressmaker make Lena a *Dirndlkleid*, like the native peasant dress she and all her friends wore. Lena's was of black and red sprigged cotton, with a tight bodice and a full skirt. She wore a fringed, flowered silk kerchief and a dark red apron; the first time she put the dress on she felt a distant, reminiscent stirring in her mind, and presently her eyes widened and she said to Frau Lehmann, "Why, of course! What a fool I am! I used to dress like this when I was a little girl in Prague—only not so fine. I remember, Mama's best dress was something like this, with a striped skirt. She wore it to Alois's funeral, and then she sold it to pay for the burial."

Frequently they went on *Ausflüge* in the mountains, the party usually consisting of Lilli Lehmann, her sister Marie, one or two friends, Lena, and Baby the dachshund. Usually Lena had to carry the *Futterkörbchen*, and woe betide her if she stumbled and dropped it, to spoil the beautiful arrangement of cold *Backhänderl*, sliced *Würste*, hard-cooked eggs, *Torte*, and white wine that it contained. When they stopped on a mountainside to spread the cloth and picnic on the grass it was not uncommon for Frau Lilli to draw herself up in an exuberance of spirits and hail the surrounding elements with a blood-tingling *Hoyo-to-ho* and a few other phrases of Brünnhilde's. Sometimes her appreciative audience included one or two cows who would wander over to inspect the party and the food it was enjoying.

Lena had never in all her life had a holiday, had never seen a beautiful view, never swam in a lake, danced in a country festival (as all her ancestors had done), or had any friends with whom to enjoy such things. In a few short weeks she felt herself transformed. Maestro Pizzetti had loved her dearly but he had not been able to widen her world like Lilli Lehmann, who grew to love her and delight in her in a

different way. She was more impersonal yet more intimate, for she was the first woman friend in Lena's life. This rich experience was unlooked for; Lena had expected to respect and admire her teacher, but never to become her close friend. With one sweep on her arm Lilli Lehmann broadened the girl's life, shaped and crystallized her ambitions, and gave her her first taste of freedom.

All the following year and through a second summer at Scharfling, Lena continued her study. Wise in her experience of international opera houses, Frau Lehmann insisted that Lena learn every rôle in French and Italian as well as German. This in a way was a monumental task, but not beyond Lena's capabilities, for nothing was so natural to her as languages, and she sang one as easily as another. "You never know when you can rise by stepping into a cast where nobody thought of putting you," Frau Lilli would say, "and you must be capable of everything. I am."

In the fall of 1898, Grau reorganized his company at the Metropolitan, which had been inactive for a year, and summoned Lilli Lehmann to return to New York. She had not sung there for six years. She was to sing in one of his most brilliant seasons, a year when he had such an aggregation of stars in his company as our incredulous eyes cannot believe when we read about it today. He had the deReszkes, Plançon, Maurel, Bispham, Van Rooy, and Dippel among the men; Lehmann, Sembrich, Melba, Nordica, Eames, and Calvé among the women; and for that one year, Franz Schalk from Vienna to conduct the Wagner. That was the year when Lehmann and Jean deReszke sang *Tristan* under Schalk and rendered what has been called the most perfect performance ever heard at the Metropolitan. She was then fifty years old, still unlimited in voice and other resources.

Lena felt much anxiety about Frau Lilli's departure, although her eyes glowed when she read over the casts and repertoire for the coming Metropolitan season. Her teacher did not miss the excitement in her face and said, "All in good time, *Lenchen*. You will be among them yourself if you do your work well."

Lena nodded, but she could not conceal her worry about her own plans. What should she do when Frau Lilli went away? Frau Lilli smiled at her and told her to stop worrying. Without saying anything to Lena, Frau Lilli had made the plans for her that she thought best. She told Lena that she was to leave in two weeks for Cassel.

"What for?" Lena asked. ("I was a lump in those days!" she exclaimed once.)

"To sing in the opera, child," Frau Lilli explained. Lena was bewildered; she had never even heard of a position at the Cassel opera and here was Frau Lilli shipping her off there. She asked about it.

"You did not think I would go off and leave you with nothing to do?" Lilli Lehmann reproved her. "This is just what you need, the correct step for you, and when I heard they could use you at Cassel I told them I would send you there."

"But they haven't heard me sing!" Lena protested.

"They heard me say you could sing," Frau Lilli answered briefly.

The position at Cassel was indeed what Lena needed, what every young singer needs and what so few of them get. This in itself is one of the chief reasons for the decline of singing in the past generation; many young singers have no period of rigorous training and all-round experience in an obscure opera house, to act as a backbone for a career. At Cassel Lena Geyer sang a repertoire of sixteen rôles for a salary of

one hundred and fifty marks a month (a little over thirty-seven dollars). This was less than she had received each week at the Metropolitan, yet there she had sung bits and here she was given the best parts. It was more than worth her while. She had been engaged as an *Anfängerin*, a beginner, yet a few words from Frau Lehmann to the director caused him often to cast Lena in leads, where Lehmann wanted her to have experience. In the *Ring* she sang Freia, Sieglinde, and Gutrune. Also she sang Eva, Elsa, and Elisabeth. She alternated between the Contessa and Cherubino in *Figaro*, and between Donna Anna and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*. She sang the First Dame in the *Magic Flute*, and Dorabella in *Così Fan Tutte*. She sang Agathe in *Der Freischütz*, and Marzellina in *Fidelio*. She sang Marguerite and Violetta, in German like all the other parts, and topped off the season by learning in ten days and stepping into an emergency, Carmen. This was more or less of a joke to her until she heard the thundering applause outside. "Then it first occurred to me," she said, "that Carmen was a good part for me and I decided I would do some real work on it."

Frau Lehmann had warned her not to spend any money on costumes, but to wear whatever the wardrobe provided, even if it were ludicrously bad. She did not tell Lena that the next step forward would require good and permanent costumes of her own, not knowing just when that step would come. As a matter of fact, Lena spent only one season in Cassel; in the spring when Frau Lehmann returned from New York, Lena told her that Richard Strauss, who was then the chief conductor of the Berlin Opera, had sent for her to give an audition.

"Well?" Frau Lilli inquired, "and how did it go?"

"I haven't given it yet," Lena answered. "I was waiting for you to come home and tell me if I should."

Lilli Lehmann almost exploded. She sent word to Strauss that Lena Geyer would be on hand for her audition the following morning, and Lena had to sing only one aria before she was engaged for leading rôles at the Royal Opera, her contract beginning in October 1899. This was actually the commencement of her career. She accompanied Lilli Lehmann to Scharfling again, where they spent the summer polishing the rôles Lena was to sing, and also in learning *Norma*, for which Lehmann decided the time had come. There were three rôles above all others which Frau Lehmann had brought to historic perfection; *Norma*, *Leonore* in *Fidelio*, and *Isolde*. She wished to hand this achievement on to Lena Geyer, but insisted it could be done only over a period of time and with the most serious study. It was years before Lena encompassed them all.

On the twenty-ninth of October, 1899, she made her début at the Berlin Royal Opera as *Elsa*, with Strauss conducting. She was then twenty-four. Though her name was completely unknown in Berlin, the musical gossips made it their business as soon as her appearance was announced to find out all about her. All they could discover was that she was Lilli Lehmann's best pupil; that she had had one year at Cassel, and that her nationality was a mystery. Frau Lehmann had advised her to conceal if possible the season at the Metropolitan, lest somebody mistakenly attribute celebrity to her that she did not yet have, which might hurt her in Berlin later. The simplest way to handle this was to say nothing of her whereabouts previous to Berlin; so people did not know she had ever been in America. Lena wished to forget the four dreadful years in New York before she had found Maestro Pizzetti; and she succeeded, though later in her life episodes from the East Side and the box-factory would flash into her mind and bring a strange tension to her face.

She was never a good correspondent, but she had written pretty faithfully to Pizzetti while she was studying in Germany. He lost most of her letters when a charwoman threw the packet containing them into the fire, but he had put away somewhere by itself the one she wrote him about her Berlin début. Here it is:

Carissimo Maestro—

It is over, thank God, and I am told it was a success. I was sick when they told me it was to be Elsa, but what could I do? I thought of asking Frau Lilli to see if they could give me a good part for my debut, but I decided I would be a fool to enter the opera, clinging to her skirts, and anyway they never do much to please her here—can you believe it? I knew you would be ashamed of me for doing such a thing. Most girls want nothing better than Elsa, and you know how it is here, traditional. No wonder I hate the *dumme Gans*—first the part is half witted and then everybody has to make a debut in it. If I could only have had Elisabeth!

Strauss was very nice to me. I suppose he thought I would be nervous. He came to the dressing-room before he went down, and told me not to mind, the Kaiser was coming. He patted my shoulder and told the dresser to move the veil back a little so they could see my cheekbones better—he seems to think they are important. The orchestra was wonderful, and when we went out into the *couloir* to wait for the cue I had such pleasure listening to it I really forgot what I was doing there. All of a sudden I found myself walking and the first thing I knew the two girls ahead of me had stepped up onto the incline and there I was on the stage!

I sang well. I wasn't nervous at all. Once you get on the stage, it's just the same wherever you are, I don't care what's in the audience. This orchestra is by far the best I've sung with (much better than New York or Cassel) and of course Strauss is splendid. He gives you a good support and you feel all the time as if you are riding on a wagon with big strong springs.

There was lots of applause after the second act and the dresser told me they were yelling *Hoch!* but I don't remember hearing that.

Afterwards when I was getting undressed Frau Lilli came back and kissed me and said I was a good girl. A few other people came into the dressing-room and Strauss introduced them and they all said nice things. When I was ready to leave and was saying good-night to Grete, the dresser, she thanked me for the money and then looked at me in such a queer way and said "Are you all alone, Fräulein? Have you no family to rejoice over you tonight?" Do you know, that was the first thing in the whole evening that really touched my heart, and I felt like crying. I didn't think of any family, darling Maestro, but only of you, and I missed you so terribly. Going home in the street car I found a corner seat in the back where I could cry in peace, and I did it. I made myself a glass of hot milk with honey and got into bed feeling less like a newly launched prima donna than any *Backfisch* who ever lived.

It is all due to you—everything and anything that I am or can ever make of myself. Frau Lilli is wonderful and this would never have come to pass without her. I love her very much. But that, too, goes back to you because I would never have come here but for you. From now on it is hard work and many responsibilities. I love every bit of it, but most of all the feeling that you are there in the background, watching over me and expecting me to do my best. I shall always do it for you, and always love you more than anyone in the whole world. Your

LENA.

Not much time elapsed after her début in Berlin before Lena Geyer attracted attention in other German capitals and in Paris and London. Travellers returned home with fabulous reports of the new Berlin soprano, and some of these stirred the curiosity of managers who went to hear her on her home stage. Thereafter offers for guest engagements began to flow in. Covent Garden made a modest one, which Geyer refused

under the guidance of Lehmann, who advised her to wait until she could state her own terms and be sure of having them accepted. On the other hand, she advised Lena to sing when she could at Dresden, Leipzig, and Munich for the benefit of experience under different great German conductors. As her fame spread she began to increase the size of her fees; her salary at the Berlin Opera was raised twice in her first three years, and finally in the spring of 1902, she received an invitation from the Opéra in Paris to sing Elisabeth in French. This she wanted very much to do. *Tannhäuser* was regarded as Paris's own property, and she could ask no better circumstances for a début. At that time the Paris Opéra was distinguished by the refulgence of its artists. The deReszkes, Plançon, Journet, Melba, Sembrich, Eames, and Nordica all appeared there—Grau's fabulous Metropolitan casts intact. These were splendid auspices for a début outside Germany, and Lena signed a contract for the spring and early summer season as guest artist.

Until this time Lena had worked with such application that she had had no personal life. She had wanted none. The devastating experience that had brought her to the prostration from which Maestro Pizzetti had helped her regain her feet had wiped out any incipient taste she might ever have had for pleasure and distraction. Her instinctive reply to all invitations was refusal. The moment she removed her costume and make-up after a performance she became the serious, reserved student who seemed aware of nothing on earth but her work. Though she now had a modest, if comfortable income, it seemed most natural to her to put nearly all of it in the bank and continue to live with the severe frugality she had always imposed on herself. In a year and a half she had paid back the loan from Lucarelli and banked substantial savings besides. She had no social life at all.

Occasionally, upon Lilli Lehmann's insistence, she would go to her house to dine, and there meet people important in the musical life of Europe, but of her own volition she did nothing except study and work.

She left for Paris with the firm intention of carrying out her usual routine. She was just twenty-seven, entering the prime of her looks and spirits. Anybody seeing her on the stage could not believe she was not the typical opera singer of the time—with lovers, jewels, champagne suppers, and every luxury waiting to claim her. She was exuberant, vital, passionate, and spectacular. It was unbelievable that this could all be buried under a gray cloak, and driven home in solitude in a shabby hack. But it was. She derived tremendous stimulation from this ascetic way of life. She said it released all the fullness of her powers into her voice and her imagination. She never dreamed that she might be suppressing a fountainhead of inspiration.

She made her first world-reverberating success with her Paris début, and from that moment the city was at her feet. She was paid far more than she had ever been before. For the first time she saw that she had the right to spend money for things other than bare living expenses. She had always worn her simple clothes well and she realized now that she could indulge in beautiful clothes, having more than enough money to pay for them. That there might be anywhere to wear the clothes except on her solitary walks and drives never occurred to her. She was sought after and invited out by the dazzling fashionable world of Paris, and Royalty from across the channel lost no time in requesting to meet her. Russian grand dukes and Italian princes tried to obtain introductions. The director of the Opéra begged her, almost in tears, to be a little lenient, a little gracious. She remained firm. It was her rule never to make social engagements,

never to meet men, and she refused to waive it. Anyone less compelling on the stage could probably not have pursued such a course without turning every influential hand against her. Geyer's singing swept them all into an incoherent, adoring mass; her personal aloofness only excited them the more. Unintentionally (or so she insisted) she had played a master-stroke.

She had been engaged for four *Tannhäuser* performances, but after the initial furore, and upon the director's discovery of the scope of her repertoire, she was booked for regular appearances throughout the Paris season. In Germany she had concentrated on Wagner and Mozart. Here she was called upon to sing French and Italian scores that she had not sung since her bits in 1897, but of which she had been taught the leading rôles by Pizzetti and Lehmann. She sang Valentine in *Les Huguenots*, Norma, Violetta in *Traviata*, Leonora in *Trovatore*, as well as Donna Anna and the Contessa and Elsa. Her versatility was the final touch to intoxicate the Paris public, and this was the state of opinion about her, and the atmosphere in which she was working, when a major influence aside from music entered her life.

Chapter Six

I WAS never able to induce Lena Geyer to say more than a few words about the Duc de Chartres. At any mention of his name she would grow stiff and distant, look away from me, and change the subject. This is probably just as well, for her wish to keep the whole matter secret prompted her to rush from London to Paris in the spring of 1927, shortly after the duke's death, and enter into negotiations with his heirs. She had not known of the existence of his private memoirs, which his executors were selling to a publisher. When she heard that they were about to be printed, she begged the editor to omit the parts referring to her, or at least to put them in a supplement to be published after her death. He refused. Finally, in despair, she offered the heirs and the firm jointly a sum almost twice as large as they could have expected the complete book to bring in sales. They capitulated, and Lena carried the manuscript back to New York with her.

I cannot forget the day, two years ago, when Lena and I drove down to the bank in her car. She was already in bad health, and was pale, with an ominous sallowness she had only very recently begun to show. She was also nervous and ill at ease, and did not say a word all the way from the Plaza to Wall Street. I was surprised that we went down there; I knew she banked at an uptown branch of her trust company. However, we drove to the main office, and as we walked slowly to the vault elevator, Lena took my arm, as if for support—a most unusual thing for her to do. Downstairs she

asked me to wait for her, and disappeared into the vaults with the attendant.

After a long time the door of one of the private rooms opened and Lena emerged carrying a heavy package wrapped in brown paper and fastened with lead seals. She had been gone so long that I had pictured her opening and looking through the manuscript, and forgetting time as she recalled those years of long ago. But she had not; and though I knew she hoped I would not do so, I looked into her face. It was extremely pale and drawn, and for once her green eyes lacked their wells of vivid light. They were flat and veiled. Her mouth was tense, drawn down at the corners. I had never seen her look so homely or so old, and my heart went out to her in a great surge. I took the heavy package from her and carried it to the car. Again riding uptown she did not speak at all; but just before we stopped at my bank, where I had promised to keep the manuscript, sealed, until after her death, she put her hand on my arm and said, "Please, David. Please."

When in the empty weeks following her death I took the manuscript from the bank and opened it, expecting to use excerpts here and there in my account of Lena, I discovered that the closely written pages in the delicate handwriting of the duke could not be cut up and inserted into other writing at will. I am accustomed to seeing many manuscripts every day, but one has never come into my hands that so breathed the personality of its author as this mass of thin, grayish French paper, closely written with a fine-pointed pen in watery black ink. As I turned the pages reverently, and read further and further into the heart of this astonishing chronicle, I saw the whole world in which this dead man and his worshipped mistress had found their happiness. I realized that the best I could do would be to translate the manuscript

literally and carefully, and perhaps to delete matters irrelevant to Lena Geyer. I thought the task a great privilege.

From the Memoirs of the Duc de Chartres

I returned to Paris late in the spring of 1902, having been away for two years on the world journey described in my last chapters. The death of my honored father, Armand Louis-Celestin Guy Joseph Marie Laurent Antoine Camille, ninth Duc de Chartres, Prince de Montchalimar, Marquis de Beauvoir et Saint-Michel, had required me to return and take up the administration of the family estates and of my fortune, which I then inherited under the entail. I am so frank as to admit that my departure for the uncharted ends of the earth had been to a certain extent precipitated by the unusual vehemence of my youthful character, with its exceptional degree of independence that caused my dear parents so much mental unrest. I had passed my thirtieth year without, I regret to say, having shown a satisfactory degree of obedience by following their wishes in respect to marriage and the furtherance of the family line. No suggestion of a suitable *partie* had won my approval, and my dear parents were so unusually indulgent as not to open negotiations with the parents of any young lady whom they could not be certain I should consent to wed. This tenuous situation had become sufficiently displeasing to my family to justify my long absence from home, during which time they hoped I should dispose of my over-exuberance of spirits in encounters with primitive dangers, and return in a more amenable frame of mind.

It was thus that, upon my return, my widowed mother, after a lapse of time calculated to accustom me to my new responsibilities, reopened the question of my marriage. My

knowledge of women had vastly increased during the years of my travels, and I was prepared at last to consider the dynastic necessities of my line. I had tasted the highly spiced fare of five continents in all varieties of feminine charm. My last mistress had been a dark-eyed and hot-tempered beauty of Athens, where I had tarried many months in attendance upon her exotic charms. The termination of an association with a person of that type tends to influence one directly toward the opposite. My mother, having ascertained that I would not be too resistant to the wish nearest her heart, informed me that she and the older members of our family unanimously favored Mademoiselle Marguerite de Montrecourt, daughter of the Marquis de Montrecourt-Béthune. I gave her tentative assurance of my co-operation, subject to the condition that I be allowed to see the young woman before formal negotiations for her hand were opened. This was arranged, and at a ball given by my great-aunt, the dowager Comtesse de Chaulnes, I was presented to a ravishing young creature of eighteen, unforgettable in a pale rose-colored tulle gown of most delicate inspiration. She had features of the chiselled exquisiteness known only to the rarest cameos, and a halo of pale gold hair which gave her face an ethereal and dreamlike radiance. As I escorted her back to her mother after our waltz together, I resolved to tell my mother that she might rely at last upon the obedience of a dutiful and sensible son.

It was, alas for my new-found compliance, the following evening that I attended the Opéra in company with three of my friends, young noblemen of my own age who were habitués of all the gilded and glittering resorts that made our Paris of that time so captivating. I had never been a devoted attendant of the Opéra. My education had been deficient in the sole respect of music, which I am told is not infrequently the case among my countrymen, and the Opéra as a spectacle

had for some reason never strongly compelled me. It was rather in a spirit of idle participation that I accompanied my friends that evening. In the light of my later attitude under the same circumstances, I deprecate the necessary admission that we were chatting, in fact, gossiping in our box, oblivious of the action upon the stage, which for a moment, was going forward without the presence of the principals of the cast.

These—and indeed, in their fame lay the reason for my presence at the opera, which was *Les Huguenots*—were the brothers deReszke as Raoul and Marcel, Pol Plançon as St. Bris, Madame Melba as Marguerite de Valois, and a newcomer from Germany, I was informed, called Madame Lena Geyer, as Valentine. As the second scene opened I was interested chiefly in Madame Melba, and next in a slightly scandalous morsel that my friend de Lanclede was whispering, when my attention was suddenly compelled by an extraordinary sound that filled the Opéra with fiery resonance. Turning instantly to the stage I saw that I had missed the entrance of Valentine, but that she was now singing, and singing as I had never heard a woman sing before. To be sure, I had not the background of familiarity with great dramatic voices that I soon afterward acquired, and therefore had nothing with which to compare this most astonishing voice; but its import was clear even to one who knew nothing of music. It was the voice of a magnificent and passionate woman, intensely alive and glowing with fervor. Its possessor was strikingly tall, broadshouldered, and young, with an erect carriage and a wonderfully free and flowing style of movement upon the stage. I seized the lorgnettes from the hand of Pierre de Barrois and gazed upon the face of the singer. I was astonished at its breadth and at the evident ease with which she produced her great and effortless tones. She

was also a splendid and imaginative actress, playing the scene where she was spurned by the misapprehended Raoul with extreme tension and a reality that, in my limited experience of opera, was entirely novel.

My companions saw that I was deeply struck, and as the curtain fell hastened to assure me that I was not alone in my instantaneous preoccupation with this Lena Geyer. She had sung at the Opéra but a few times previously, this being her first engagement away from the Berlin Royal Opera to which she was attached, and already all the young men, and the older as well, were vying with one another in their efforts to meet her. The report, which they rendered to me only too eagerly, was that the new diva had proved completely oblivious to the attentions of the most desirable gentlemen in Paris, and further that none of our friends had been able to ascertain that she had any interest beyond her art. I agreed with my intimates that for such a woman to be occupied exclusively with art was to waste one of the most extraordinary creatures ever made for the fullness of life.

I eschewed the commonplace technique of calling upon her in her dressing room after the performance. My interest, though of such recent origin, was acute and insistent, by far the strongest urge I had ever experienced toward association with a woman. That she was in appearance striking, even daring, but so far as I could tell not at all beautiful by conventional standards, served to pique my curiosity and my ambition to a feverish point. If I were to lay siege to her I would do so with all the finesse, intelligence, and subtlety at the command of a true Frenchman, for what I had heard of her refusals to receive my contemporaries suggested a personality of extreme independence and disdain.

Merely to look upon Madame Geyer would apprise the sensitive eye that she differed vastly from the usual type of

opera singer. The impression she made was one very largely of sincerity and direct appeal to the most realistic emotions. One could not conceive of dreaming about such a woman or of aspiring to her as to a deity, veiled in mystery and distance. One wished to know her, to converse with her, to touch her, indeed, to possess her, conscious that her dynamic force might be the cause of unexpected and perhaps distressing explosions. She had given me almost instantly a sense of basic and even crude strength, a strength not only inborn but enormously augmented by contacts with the most rigid exactions of life. I did not for a moment entertain the thought of capturing such a personality by means hitherto well suited to the softer and weaker women I had known, women indeed marked by the initial intention of ultimate capitulation. In this sense of strength and austerity conveyed by my first glimpse of Madame Geyer I found the key to approach to her. I saw that any element of flirtation would be repulsed. I saw that she must be in her own character earnest and serious and at the same time I derived, I know not whence, a correct impression that she had been moulded by stringent discipline.

Alas for my promised intention so pleasing to my dear mother! One glimpse of Madame Geyer had suggested to me a whole vista of feminine fascination hitherto unknown. The set of this woman's shoulders, the singularly unconfined action of her splendid body, visible despite the formidable stays of the day, the proud carriage of her head, and the vigorous directness of her hands as she used them, acted upon me like inspiriting Alpine air. By comparison the charms of Alix, my little friend of Athens, were intolerably cloying in their commonplace appeal, and the sweet virginal innocence of Mademoiselle de Montrecourt, which had, only a day before, momentarily intrigued me with its freshness,

appeared insipid and mawkish. I knew at once I could not permit my family to pursue negotiations with the Marquis de Montrecourt-Béthune. Doubtless it would not have been beyond the code of a gentleman to have married the gentle *jeune fille*, fulfilled all my contractual obligations, and otherwise devoted myself to the woman who had so utterly captured my heart and my mind. This, however, seemed to me a needless cruelty to inflict upon such a sweet and shy child. I could not consider perpetrating it.

Without difficulty I ascertained before leaving the Opéra that Madame Geyer was resident at the Hotel Regina. I cudgelled my brains throughout my supper at Maxim's to decide what tribute I could pay that would stand entirely apart, and thereby instantly impress itself upon her. At last I decided that a new rose, which had recently begun to appear in the cabinets of the most luxurious florists, would serve my end. It was of a brilliant crimson color, with stems twice the length of a man's arm, and the perfume of a single bloom was the concentrate of a dozen other roses, yet more heady and piercing. It had been named the American Beauty rose; little did I know what its significance to its recipient would be! On my way home that night I stopped at the closed shop of my florist, knowing that he lived in the apartment above it, and commanded two dozen of these magnificent roses to be delivered to Madame Geyer's bedroom at eight the following morning. Carefully stipulating that the messenger should take them in person to her bedside, and not leave them with the hotel porter, I gave the florist my card upon which I had decided to write no message. My name, my crest, my town address were upon it. If it aroused her interest, its work was done.

The following afternoon I received a note written in a large, very bold hand upon the stationery of the Hotel

Regina. At a time when most women were proud of their delicate, spidery chirography, this handwriting, bolder than a man's, was very striking. The note, every stroke of which I remember with perfect clarity, said in French: "Madame Lena Geyer thanks his grace Monsieur le Duc de Chartres for his gift of roses." Those few words filled the entire page. I had rarely read a missive couched in such terms of extreme formality, so formal as to be awkward. I saw at once that much of its writer's militant inaccessibility was a screen to hide lack of savoir-faire; indeed, it was as if I had already been told that this remarkable woman had devoted herself so passionately to her work that she had never learned or wished to learn gentler graces. I honored her the more therefor.

Tacitly she had removed any romantic significance from my gift and had put it upon the impersonal plane of regard that prompted crowned heads to give her decorations, which they did so frequently. I devoted myself to the problem of turning her attitude toward something softer. That I never missed one of her appearances at the Opéra need hardly be stated. Within a month I had heard more music than in all the previous years of my existence, and I may say that the influence of Madame Geyer upon the hitherto irksome features of operatic performances was enlivening to the highest degree. To my own great astonishment, I discovered myself to be attending with closest interest to the action and development of every opera in which she appeared. The conduct of my friends, which until then had also been my own, conversing in murmurs at all times except during the rendition of the arias by great singers, became insupportable to me. I was forced to request their silence during the entire performance when they were present as guests in my box; and for the same reason I refrained from attending the Opéra as guest of anyone else. I soon became known as a dragon

of musical earnestness, though my intimates were well aware that the source of my new intentness lay in Lena Geyer rather than in any sudden accretion of academic appreciation.

Through my close and detailed scrutiny of Madame Geyer as often as two or three times a week—for her complete capture of the Parisian public had led the management to bill her as frequently as she would consent to sing—I became, for one who had not had the pleasure of personal acquaintance, deeply familiar with her personality. Through such study of her character, in what might be termed an extraordinary external intimacy, I learned by degrees the means of gaining her appreciation and confidence. It was clear that this was no woman to be won by exotic florists' blooms, bonbons, and baubles from the jewellers of the Rue de la Paix. This was plainly a woman of wit, independence, and vigorous temperament. The slant of her large eyes was humorous; the broad column of her throat suggested amplitude of tastes as well as of voice; and the square lines of her body indicated that under conditions of intimacy she would incline toward robustness and alacrity rather than toward the more commonplace feminine characteristics. There was in her a virility that would not ordinarily appeal to a Gallic connoisseur; but to me, with a wide knowledge gained in so many remote lands, her breadth of disposition was inspiring in the extreme.

With a due sense, gained almost entirely by an acuteness of instinct in which I cannot help taking justifiable pride, that my first contacts with Madame Geyer would be in terms of comradeship, I scrutinized her for signs of those interests which we might have in common. It became comparatively simple to imagine her presence by my side as I went about my daily pursuits. If I had occasion to call upon my bookseller, I would attempt to think which books would attract her in-

terest if she were there. It was not difficult to decide which these would be; classics and modern novels of two types, the picaresque and the realistic. It thus came about that I sent her, from time to time, the works of Dumas, the novels of Dostoevsky, of Balzac, of Merrimée, of Zola. If I stopped at my parfumeur's to order pomades and *articles de toilette*, I visualized Madame Geyer drawn instinctively to such vital and uncloying fragrances as *Peau d'Espagne* and the scent of the unforgettable acacias of our lovely Cannes. These accordingly were dispatched to her. When I went in person to select the precious fruits that have ever been my preferred choice for the termination of a repast, I commanded for her the most perfect peaches, apricots, and green almonds from our rich Southern provinces; the most luxurious of grapes from Belgium; and such exotic treasures as ananas and passion-fruit from the distant tropics. Always my gift for the day was delivered at her bedside by an alert messenger, and always her acknowledgment, formal and unvarying in attitude, would reach me during the afternoon.

It was, not unnaturally, through an action of her own that I derived an idea that proved, I may confess, nothing short of brilliant, in that it accomplished my ardently desired aim. Madame Geyer was singing *Violette* and I had settled myself in good time in my box, knowing well that the great *Brindisi* was the opening chorus of the work. She and Monsieur Jean de Reszke delivered this scintillating duet with the greatest possible fire and plenitude of voice and spirits. But it was as she finished singing that her acting caught and fascinated my gaze, for she lifted her glass in toast to her lover with a gesture of complete authority! She was accustomed to handling a wineglass. Compared with the insipid wave that constituted most women's conception of the action, this struck me as a revelation. Studying her intently through my

lorgnettes as she moved about the stage in her part as hostess at the evening gala, I compared her features most carefully with Brillat-Savarin's famous definition of the means of recognizing the feminine gourmet. There I had it! The woman loved wine, and though the necessary concealment of her skin by layers of theatrical cosmetics prevented close examination, I felt that she must have a rich bloom upon those high broad cheekbones, and a moist lustre upon those wide lips. She was, actually or potentially, I could swear it, an initiate of the fine art of gourmandise!

Immediately upon returning to my residence I summoned my two devoted and accomplished aides to confer. These were Jules, our highly esteemed and trusted majordomo, who had grown portly and aged in my honored father's service, and Charet, our noble chef-de-cuisine, the memory of whose name, not to mention his creations, brings tears to my eyes to this very day. Both were, I need hardly state, overjoyed at the invitation to participate in their young master's most dearly regarded romantic venture. When I declared to them that the object of my fervent desire was a lady who, beyond doubt, was fully equipped by nature to appreciate their art, their interest rose to a point of burning enthusiasm. To this day my mind's eye can see those two truly distinguished masters, old Jules nodding his head and rubbing his hands together, and Charet in his great white cap rolling his eyes and eloquently kissing his fingertips toward the famous David murals upon the ceiling of our salon.

Next day, having learned that Madame Geyer was to be absent from the Opéra for a week, during which she was to make a guest appearance at Geneva, I laid my careful plans. I sent word to the tenant of one of my farms in that rich district of Normandie, near Rouen, whence come many of the rarest delights of our gastronomy, that he was to bring

in person to Paris, on a stipulated day within the week, the four finest ducklings of his early spring hatching. These birds were raised with such extraordinary care that the two most exacting restaurateurs in Paris customarily took the entire product of this man's yearly labor. Meanwhile my estimable Jules had taken one of the rarest treasures of our town cellar, a Château Lafite of the great year of 1865 (laid down by my honored father), and cradling it in its basket in his arms with the utmost tenderness, had driven to the Hotel Regina, whose sommelier was a good fellow, naturally much in awe of such a personage as Jules. The wine was left in the strict care of this sommelier, laid in its nook in the hotel cellar under Jules's eyes, to be left there until brought upstairs at his direction. When, in four or five days, my sturdy peasant duly arrived with his treasures in a covered basket, I turned them over to Charet, knowing that he would choose the perfection among them for his purpose. Then, having consulted with my florist and my fruiterer, and having gone personally to Les Halles to select a Pont L'Evêque of memorable texture and aroma, I retreated from the administration of the scheme, confident that all was safe in the hands of genius.

Madame Geyer's first rôle upon her return to Paris was Norma, a part that suited to perfection the nobler and more serious side of her versatile nature. Having bid a warm good-night to Jules and Charet, both of whom were in a fine state of excitement, I drove to the Opéra and took my place almost, I must admit, palpitant in my eagerness to feast my ears and eyes and, yes, my soul once more upon the woman who had become the entire object of my existence. When she began to sing, the sensation of arid desolation fled suddenly from my heart, leaving it open and throbbing as if she had laid her hand upon me. She was in splendid voice, and all

around me her auditors were leaning forward, rapt in ecstasy, as if to catch every fragment of an echo, to fix this sensation forever in their memories.

After the performance I partook of a hasty supper with one of my friends who, but for his affection for me, might have been offended by my obvious preoccupation and distraction. Then I hastened home to await Jules, who arrived late and reported upon the complete success of our plan as it had unfolded. He was, I might add, so captivated by the personality and warmth of the lady he had been sent to attend that he had some difficulty maintaining a coherence sufficient to relate the evening's happenings to me. While Madame Geyer was at the Opéra, Jules had taken charge of the *couvert* for her supper, which was arranged upon a small table in an anteroom near her apartment. Just at the hour when the hotel concierge had said she would return, two of my servants arrived to join Jules, each bearing a casserole that had been solicitously consigned to his care, with many stern admonitions, by Charet. A spirit lamp was used to keep the contents of these *à point*, and when Madame Geyer finally rang for her solitary supper, her maid opened the door to admit, not a hotel garçon with a commonplace service, but my Jules, flanked by a footman and a house page in my livery, bearing the beautiful table that had been prepared with such care.

Jules declared to me that the initial astonishment which caused Madame Geyer's eyes to stare incredulously gave way at once to an expression of tantalizing amusement and whimsicality, which played over her features continuously as she applied herself to her supper. Entire silence prevailed. First Jules served her with a consommé à la Reine, of such richness and savor as only my Charet could achieve. With this Jules poured for her one glass, but one, of a sherry that was

one of the major treasures of our house, a vintage that had been presented to my grandfather by a nobleman of the house of Villalobar almost seventy years before. He said he could solemnly assure me that he saw tears, tears of supreme pleasure, in the lady's eyes as she tasted this molten gold. Then, with aplomb such as no servant of this graceless modern age can know, Jules presented Madame with the second casserole, wherein lay brown and glistening, and steaming with the rich perfume of the rare wine used in its preparation, the chef d'œuvre of the magnificent Charet—*Caneton à la Rouennais*, ever a grand specialty of our house. Jules assured me, clasping his hands with fervid emotion, that Madame's reaction to this beautiful sight was a privilege for any man to witness. Where most ladies, he explained, would have glanced at the dish and perhaps said "*Oui, très jolie*," Madame Geyer leaned silently over the steaming casserole to savor the wonderful bouquet arising from its inspired depths; then she raised her eyes and looked up at Jules, standing beside her, with an expression, he swore, of mingled rapture and awe.

But, ever the pillar of etiquette and model of deportment, Jules remained imperturbably silent as he transferred a portion of the bird to a warm plate and laid it gently before Madame. At last, however, the great moment of the supper had come. Tenderly lifting the noble Bordeaux in its cradle, Jules approached Madame, and in his mellow voice, liquid indeed as the wines of which he was so thoroughly the master, he followed the fine old custom of our noble houses, and announced the great vintage he was about to pour. "*Madame est servie d'un Château Lafite de l'année dix-huit cent soixante-cinq*," he pronounced in the measured tones that have so often thrilled the celebrated companies about our board. Madame Geyer, he related, remained

speechless, but from emotion. With perfect finesse he half-filled the delicate tulipe he had brought. Then, he barely needed to tell me, so clearly could I picture his erect, rotund figure in its formal position, he stood silent behind her chair. He watched narrowly as Madame Geyer lifted the glass to the light, shaking her head with wonder as she gazed at the living ruby of the wine. He watched as she bent over it and closed her eyes and inhaled its divine bouquet. But just as she was about to carry the glass to her lips, she paused and quite oblivious of Jules behind her, she raised it in silent toast to the empty place opposite her, at the same time inclining her head in graceful salutation.

Ah, when I remember how my spirit soared as he related this precious episode! I knew then that my efforts had not been in vain, that there lay in the future a glorious promise for me! I was swept away on the passionate current of my dreams, so completely that I scarcely heard the remainder of Jules' account of his mission; how Madame Geyer, on tasting the Château Lafite, had looked over her shoulder and said, "I shall never forget this moment"; how when he prepared to serve her a second portion of the *caneton* she favored him with a glance of intimate mischief "like a child, like my little granddaughter, Monseigneur," he said; how when he served the fine Pont L'Evêque that I had chosen with such care, she beamed with delighted approval; how, above all, she entered so entirely into the spirit of the little adventure that it was like a romance, like a dream, to my good Jules.

"You must not forget that she is a great actress, Jules," I reminded him. "She would, in her very nature and genius for adaptation, play her part perfectly in the evening's ceremony."

"Yes, Monseigneur," he replied earnestly. "But I saw more than the great actress this evening in Madame. If I may be

pardoned for the impertinence, I have in my many years of close contact with human nature, learned much about men and women. I may dare call myself a judge. Madame, with your pardon, Monseigneur, is indeed more than a great actress. She is a great woman."

And it was the next afternoon that I received the ardently desired reward for my perseverance. The note in the strong masculine hand read: "If Monsieur le Duc de Chartres should ever in the future honour Madame Geyer by a repetition of his interest in her supper, he may, if he wishes, share the occasion with a most appreciative friend."

Thus it came about that, confident of her acceptance, I invited Madame Geyer to sup with me following her performance in *Lohengrin* four days thence. She acknowledged my roses and my note of invitation with the first words that I had received in direct address from her pen. She accorded me the privilege of calling upon her in her dressing room after the performance, and would give herself the pleasure of supping with me, stipulating only, in view of my already demonstrated understanding of her tastes, that it was her invariable rule to eat her evening meal in seclusion after singing. I was more than grateful for this delightful bit of information, not only because it facilitated my plans which I wished to be a pattern of perfection, but because I had never dared hope that my first meeting with her would be in the thrilling form of an entirely secluded tête-à-tête. I had supposed that the lady would prefer the impersonal atmosphere of a public restaurant, but there I was wrong. I did not yet understand her so thoroughly as to realize that, should any conflict arise between her ordinary preferences and the necessities of her voice, she would invariably bow to the exactions of the latter. Thus, while it was doubtless not to her taste to be alone with me upon the occasion of our first meeting,

she was forced to sacrifice her wishes in deference to the voice whose well-being controlled her life.

Mastering the eagerness that would have impelled me, had I been slightly younger, to rush to her dressing room immediately upon the fall of the curtain, I occupied my impatience with an *apéritif* at the buffet, to give her ample time to refresh herself from her labors and make her toilette. Some of my gay friends, entirely unaware of the progress that I had made in my inconspicuous pursuit of Lena Geyer, saw fit to banter me upon my lingering at the Opéra, never guessing what that short interval portended, or that the inaccessible deity had consented to make that evening an illumination in my life. At last I knocked upon her door, and was admitted to find her standing cloaked and ready to depart. I carried her hand to my burning lips before I dared look full into her face; then I raised my head and gazed at that countenance, every nuance of which will be forever sculptured upon my brain. She was pale and she appeared tired, but there was not a line of listlessness in the magnificent pose of her body. She stood erect, her astonishingly broad shoulders held so firmly that her heavy cloak swept back in a subtle suggestion of folded wings. Her great glowing eyes, placed as if by the robust hand of the master Michelangelo beneath a broad classical forehead, were much to my astonishment green, and her skin, which had indeed the bloom I had long ago anticipated, had likewise a peculiar, delicate pallor. Her mouth was wide, her lips not thick but firmly closed in a reposeful line; her nostrils flared slightly in a suggestion of passion and an assurance of the vitality that radiated from her as warmth from flame.

We exchanged no perfunctory greeting. She gave me her hand with a sudden smile that emphasized the free lines of her broad, square countenance, and illuminated its repose like

a ray of starlight. Many conventional phrases of appreciation and delight rushed to my lips, but died there as I succumbed to the force of her presence. In every way she towered above all women I had known. In a current from her to me I sensed a reality, an absolute absence of pose and affectation, which commanded in turn earnestness and simplicity in my response to her. This was not so much surprising as it was almost unbearable in its beauty and import. I had heard her sing certain notes from time to time that had caused me to cease breathing in a degree of exquisite, pleasurable pain; now her presence affected me likewise.

She spoke, and I found myself listening to the cadences of a speaking voice of incomparable richness, a deep voice for the possessor of her glorious soprano, and one exquisitely tempered by the facility of her vocal organ.

"I know you will forgive my eccentricities," she said in perfect French, "but after singing it is not possible for me to indulge in festivity. This is not very gay," she said ruefully, pointing to her nunlike attire.

"Madame," I replied, "the joy of being with you makes this the greatest festival of my life."

I gave her my arm and escorted her out to my carriage. I had reserved a small private salon at Foyot's, whence we drove directly. Since the evening was chilly, a small, bright fire was burning on the hearth, and a supper-table laid for two was drawn near it, with a cushioned fauteuil on either side. I had divined that relaxation was what she must seek immediately after singing, and had directed these inviting armchairs in place of the usual straight ones. She gave me a glance of appreciation as she stood for a moment beside the fire, holding out her large white hands to the warmth. Then she surrendered her long, hooded cloak to the waiter, and sank into her chair. I was vastly fascinated by her

appearance. Instead of the tightly laced figure of fashion that every lady presented, with a mass of elaborately curled and modelled hair, I saw before me a woman almost nun-like in the austerity of her costume and coiffure. Her brown hair was parted and drawn smoothly back to a low chignon; her figure was unlaced, and its long, relaxed lines clad in a loose gown of dark, wine-red velvet, belted with a girdle of silk rope. I did not immediately realize that this tenue was not a complete defiance of the current mode and a personal affectation of its wearer's; I soon learned that it was her preferred dress after singing, in which she was accustomed to seek relaxation, and that on all other occasions she was as susceptible to the whims of fashion as any belle.

Our conversation was fragmentary and conducted in low tones; indeed she explained to me almost at once that it was her habit after singing to speak as nearly as possible in whispers, a practice very beneficial to her throat. I was surprised at the fluency of her French and at the absence of a Teutonic accent, for I was under the impression that Madame Geyer was a native of Germany. She told me that this was not the case, but did not further enlighten me as to her nationality. I gathered that she spoke a number of languages with equal facility and that she called no specific land her home. Fearful lest she interpret my meaning to overstep the bounds of the distance that I knew I must keep for an indefinite period, I ventured that Paris would be honored to offer her its permanent hospitality. She only smiled and assured me that a wandering life had many charms.

All during this first memorable evening with my beloved, so subdued, yet so subtle in tone, I found myself secretly conjecturing what her background—her past, in more vulgar terms—might be. She presented a picture of utter mystery. Clearly she was no girl, no virgin, no innocent. The rich and

firm lines of her mouth, the confident expression of her eyes, the tone of her hands—if I may use this expression to describe what to me has always been the most accurate gauge of a woman's experience—and above all the outlines of her body which, while young and resilient, was not that of a girl, confirmed my instinct that she was a woman of experience. Yet the austerity of her manner, the total absence of coquetry, the invisible certainty that she was mistress of herself, of me, of this and all future situations, gave me to understand that love had never yet insinuated a tender and delicious meaning into her mind and heart. Much could be ascribed to her earnest preoccupation with her exacting art, but I sensed also that whatever experience she had had of man and his ardor had been to her a dreadful thing, and had left her cold and rigid. I felt that I must not only woo her, but that I was facing the necessity as well to undermine a certain fear and hatred of romance. For a woman less overpowering to my imagination, less new in every thought and action, less magnificent in personality, I should never have set myself this difficult task. It might have sufficed merely to meet her.

But Lena Geyer took relentless possession of every thread and fibre of my being. If I had felt from hearing and seeing her as an artist upon the stage that she was predestined for my heart and my arms, I knew now with unwavering certainty that she must ultimately yield to my love. Already I was all too keenly aware that she might lack to an agonizing degree the capacity to love me reciprocally, but that would be after all part of her vast, if austere, nature. It was within the bounds of possibility that love could be for her only a rich accessory to the main core of her existence, her singing. There I must take my chances.

I made no reference to the inaccessibility that had kept all

Paris at bay, and she none to my persistence in pleasing her with my gifts and attentions. One unusual characteristic of our association had its inception there; we never reviewed in conversation any event or attitude that was past. What is called nowadays a "post-mortem" in discussion was totally absent from our relationship. All of our understanding was tacit to a remarkable degree, and our ability to dispense with discussion admitted no leeway for petty disagreements and lovers' quarrels. During that first evening she was so subdued of manner that, after making all allowances for her fatigue, I was convinced rather against my instinctive judgment that she was deficient in animation, although such vitality emanated from her quiet form that I could accept my own analysis only with hesitation. I took her home an hour after midnight, and as I was leaving her at the lift in the lobby of her hotel, I asked if I might hope for the privilege of seeing her again. She smiled quietly and said she was looking forward to our next meeting. I inquired what day and what time of day would give her the most pleasure. After a moment's hesitation, she suggested luncheon three days hence.

The appointed day dawned beautifully soft and clear, with a benign early June sun. I decided as soon as Pierre drew the curtains in my bedchamber to call for Madame Geyer in the trap, which I would myself drive with Rouart, the younger groom, behind. This order, when it reached the stables, was doubtless no disappointment to Poquelin, my father's old coachman, who frowned upon all my gay excursions and felt himself much belittled by some of the nocturnal destinations to which I had, in the past, commanded him to drive me. He, of all my retainers, would have been the most highly pleased by my marriage, for he would then have had a young mistress to drive out for afternoon calls and

sorties in the Bois, for which my mother was growing too old, and for which he felt himself suited by convention and prejudice.

But picture my astonishment when, after sending up my name at the Hotel Regina, and waiting in the lobby while Rouart held my bays outside, to be greeted by a girl, a child, who almost danced out of the lift and offered me her hand with a sparkling smile of greeting! My heart rose in a joyful sweep to my lips, and I pressed its very essence upon her glove. With a step so light that I could not reconcile it to the stately tread of the woman I had met three nights before, she tripped down the steps and at the sight of my smart turnout, fresh in its yellow paint and glistening from its morning polish, with the glossy bays prancing and champing, she clapped her hands. "Oh, how beautiful!" she cried. "How wonderful! How could you know how much this would please me?"

She sprang into her place, Rouart placed the broadcloth throw across her knees, and then took his seat. We were off, bowling up the Rue de Rivoli and out the Champs Elysées to the Bois, Madame Geyer beaming with delight at my side. The contrast in her toilette from that which I had first seen was even greater than that in her mood; she was attired in a *tailleur* of the smartest possible cut, fitting with all the perfection of our cleverest *couture* the slim lines of a waist now laced, indeed, but flexible and youthful as few I had ever seen. Her blouse was a *frou* of delicate embroidery and Belgian lace, with a tight high collar which became her marvellously; her hair was piled high in the current fashion, and topped with a dashing creation that sported two stiff feathers and a tantalizing veil. She sat erect and spirited, poised upon the edge of the seat in a transport of eagerness, her back exquisitely straight and flat, her head high and

thrown back in token of complete enjoyment. I was so distracted with delight that I could barely direct the necessary amount of attention to my high-spirited horses, and the gods themselves must have laughed at the exuberance of our spirits as we flew through the alleys of the Bois. If I flattered myself that my attentions to Madame Geyer had been secret previously, I had no more such illusions now, for within the hour the news had flown through Paris—Chartres was driving Lena Geyer in the Bois, and both were joyful with a joy that could mean one thing alone.

We lunched at Armenonville, and though the trees were in full leaf and the atmosphere lacked the ineffable beguilement of our beloved Paris in early May, spring was fresh in my heart and I think Madame Geyer was happier than the mere pleasure of the occasion would indicate. I wanted to consult her about the menu, but she would not listen; she waved it aside and told me to order whatever I wished. I cannot remember what we ate, but I know she ate it with enormous relish. I being already in love and turbulent with adoration, could not eat a mouthful, and only remember drinking glass after glass of a particularly fine Chevalier Montrachet that I had chosen to accompany the trout. The quality of Madame's mood prevented the conversation from turning to anything but delicious nonsense; she had a strong sense of the ridiculous, and when one of our celebrated dowager countesses appeared upon the *terrasse*, puffing and waddling, followed by a small old pug puffing and waddling in identical rhythm, I thought Madame Geyer would choke from suppressed laughter.

But as we were finishing our coffee—she had refused a *fine*, and I learned that she never drank distilled spirits—she gazed out upon the park with its leafy boughs woven into a tapestry shot through by the pleasant sunshine. "I do love

Paris," she said, "I can easily see why it captures so many willing victims. But I must tear myself away, *hélas!*"

My heart sank and seemed to crash somewhere in ruins about my boots.

"You are going away?" I asked in consternation.

"But of course," she answered with a gesture. "Back to Berlin. Were you not aware that I belong there?"

Of course I had known this, but in the excitement of having her in Paris had overlooked her connections elsewhere. I must have looked desolate indeed, for she laughed softly. "I shall be back," she said. "Next spring, when the *chataigniers* are blooming here." She pointed to the branches over our heads. I followed her gesture, and something within me seemed to exclaim, to tell my willing mind to follow the motion of that strong white hand. The necessity was clear; I too must go. But I said nothing to her, not daring to let her guess the full power of my motives. I murmured some reasonably conventional sentiments of regret, and ascertained that she had but two performances more in Paris before leaving for her summer in Austria, followed by the winter season at the royal opera in Berlin.

I saw Madame Geyer three times more before the day of her departure—once when she allowed me to join her for her long daily walk. In vain did I attempt to entice her into my jeweller's upon the Rue de la Paix, to select some little memento of our happy acquaintance. Another time she consented to accompany me to the Comédie; she had never seen one of our great French actresses and was deeply moved by a noble performance of *Phaedre*. The last evening I spent with her was the night of her final appearance. She had sung Elisabeth, the part in which Paris loved her best and gave her most lavishly its adoration in demonstration and applause. I had no definite engagement with her; I had sensed her

reluctance to make one, and had merely sent a note, with my flowers, hoping that she would not be too tired after the performance to enjoy her supper and her rest.

Her singing that night was inspired to a degree. Indeed when she delivered the greeting to the hall of song, with indescribably thrilling beauty and brilliance of voice, she seemed almost to be singing to the Opéra itself, to the hall where she had had such triumphs in one short season, and so utterly captivated the hearts of the capricious Parisians. As I went backstage after the curtain, I found to my annoyance that the guard, in spite of Madame Geyer's strict admonitions, had admitted four or five determined worshippers to the corridor of her room, who stood around hoping somehow to be admitted to her presence. When they saw me they exchanged significant glances. The situation was indeed delicate, for I had no reason to suppose that I would be admitted, and if I were not, there would be a mortifying tale all over the boulevards next morning. If, however, I were admitted, there would also be a tale. But it was too late to retreat. I knocked upon the door, which was opened a crack by one Dora, Madame Geyer's ill-tempered maid who, I am sure, would gladly have slammed the door in my face. But she dared not, having once previously been told to admit me, and after glancing at me a moment, she asked me to wait while she consulted her mistress. Almost immediately she returned and invited me to enter. And as the heavy door closed behind me I could picture only too clearly the buzz of comment that filled the corridor.

My beloved sat before her mirror, still in costume and make-up, which rather surprised me as she had had considerable time to remove them. She was an unpredictable woman; if she usually hastened to remove her costumes, there were times when she made no haste at all, and gave no reason

therefor. She held out both hands to me with a warm smile of greeting, and I clasped them, barely managing to restrain my impulse to cover them with passionate kisses.

"How kind of you to come," she said, a remark that naturally astonished me in view of her known dislike of dressing-room visitors. I soon learned that what she disliked was curious, importunate strangers flocking to her dressing room; she enjoyed the visits of people of whom she was fond, finding the peculiar intimacy of the setting, permissible only to her profession, a sort of reward for good work upon the stage. So thorough was her absence of coquetry, of the instinct to associate her looks with studied effects, that she began to remove her stage habiliments as casually as if I had not been in the room. She asked me to seat myself and wait until she was ready, which was tantamount to an assurance that she would sup with me, and retiring behind a screen with the disagreeable Dora, emerged in a moment with her white robe replaced by a brief *déshabillé*. She sat down and whisked the long blonde wig from her head, leaving an apparition for me to face in the mirror almost too grotesque for contemplation, at which she chuckled with amusement.

"Anyone would think," she said, "that you had never waited upon an actress in her dressing room!" She gave me a look of deliberate raillery, and I felt constrained to assure her that this was a new experience for me. She drew down the corners of her mouth and pulled in her chin, narrowing her green eyes to a twinkle of mockery; and I could only find words to protest by reminding her that this was hardly a becoming mood for the recently sainted Elisabeth.

"I will tell you a secret, Monsieur," she replied. "I never felt less like Elisabeth than I did this evening. This was the evening I should have sung Carmen! Ai!—what I should have done as Carmen!" She made a gesture of arm and

elbow and shoulder, and a *moue* of tantalizing sorcery. She was in a mood to drive a man mad, one of a thousand, perhaps, of which I had seen only a few. Yet I knew that this was no real coquetry to lead me on, no flirting; it was rather the high spirits of a young animal, the headiness of a colt that tries its own fleetness and power, and finds them good.

This delightful mood continued through supper; but as the meal drew to an end—a meal that remains unequalled in my memory for its sparkling humor and the fragrance of her personality—she became serious and leaned toward me across the table.

“You have been so charming to me,” she said, “and you must know that I appreciate it. If I seemed gauche, at first, and brusque, will you believe it was not altogether intentional?”

It was as if she had said that she could not help herself. I longed to rise from my place, to go to her side and kneel beside her and plead my cause; indeed, for a moment I thought the time was ripe, and gazed into her eyes for the signal I knew I should find there. Gaze as I would, however, I could find only friendship and deep appreciation. I knew the time had not come. I must wait.

She was leaving Paris on the *wagon-lit* the following evening, and had consented to allow me to have Pierre make all her arrangements. I took her to the train, making sure that she was settled in her compartment with every comfort and luxury. Pierre had mineral water and white wine in an iced hamper, and fruit and books. I knew Madame Geyer expected of me a desolation because of her departure, desolation as great as that feeling would have been had I really been taking a year's leave of her. I remained deeply subdued, in fact speechless when the moment came to kiss her hand and bid her godspeed. My speechlessness, in reality, was half

profound emotion, and half an attempt to hide my delight at the thought of the trick I was playing upon her.

Yet there was in that first good-bye between us another and deeper emotion for me, a profound satisfaction, a kind of burning joy which sprang from my observation of her own genuine regret at parting from me. As I descended from the train and stood outside her window chatting with her, she kept a handkerchief in her hand; and just as the train started to move she leaned from the window and said, "Perhaps if I knew you better, I would have serious use for this." With which she waved it and disappeared.

Chapter Seven

I HAD apprised myself thoroughly of Madame Geyer's immediate plans. She was to join her celebrated teacher, Lilli Lehmann, in Berlin, and from there travel to Austria with her where it was her habit to spend the summer in rest and study. I had arranged for someone in our Berlin Embassy to telegraph me the date of her first appearance in the fall, so soon as it was announced, and accordingly I learned that she was to reappear upon her home stage on October the twentieth. She had assured me with some want of alacrity in speaking of Berlin, that the Kaiser and the court would undoubtedly be present at her first appearance, as she had become one of the chief favorites of the company. Her marked indifference to the public favor of the Emperor struck me as a possible veiled reflection of private distaste, acquired in some manner about which I had no liberty to make inquiry. I could not, however, suppress my tacit curiosity, and found myself more than once pondering upon the devious threads that have for centuries entangled crowned heads with celebrated protagonists of the arts.

Accordingly, I made my own plans, and went so far as to assign multifarious details of financial and administrative importance to my late father's estate agent, with the statement that I might be absent from France for an indefinite time. My dear mother's piteous consternation wrung my heart, wherefore I forbore to inform her as to the actual motive for my departure, and was finally able to convince her that my absence was both necessary to myself, and not

necessarily to be interpreted as cause for unhappiness upon her part. I took my departure from Paris, accompanied by a somewhat disillusioned Pierre, who had fatuously supposed that he would never again have to wander over the globe in my quixotic wake.

Thus it was that upon the twentieth of October I had a place in the extremely brilliant audience that greeted Lena Geyer upon her return to that stage which, quite naturally, had assumed a proprietary interest in her. Her association with Lilli Lehmann, alone, would have caused the Berlin public to assume this attitude of prideful possession; but when it became clear that Geyer, of all the great immortal's pupils, gave the most promise of meeting the prodigious challenge of her preceptor, she was taken passionately to the heart of this—I must admit—most discriminating musical public.

She sang the rôle I had last heard her perform, Elisabeth. But here an electrifying experience awaited me; for I had heard her sing, in Paris, only in French, a language in which she was as proficient as our native artists, and to which she lent some strength through the powerful validity of her impersonations. So insular does the strongly patriotic mind tend to become that I had really never considered the matter of opera in other languages than my own, in spite of the fact that the greatest works presented at our Opéra were all translations from the German or the Italian in which they originated. Picture, then, my start of astonishment when the curtain of the second act rose upon the now gloriously familiar vision of my beloved hastening with arms upraised to greet the hall of song, and I heard that divine voice begin, *Dich, teure Halle, grüss' ich wieder!* Long before she finished, the inspiring aria had caused my heart to beat with unprecedented vehemence, and I knew at once that I was hearing her as I had never really heard her before—in a vital

unity of language and music. Her prayer in the final act became a thousand times more poignant, the magnificent choral singing of the Pilgrims, in their own tongue, genuinely religious in inspiration. I had believed myself more than a little cynical, and an emotionally emancipated man, but I most freely admit that, dramatic spectacle as it was, that performance of *Tannhäuser* found no more humble and credulous listener than myself. The great Richard Strauss conducted.

Immediately afterward I hastened backstage, not without some difficulty in convincing the burly Prussian guards stationed throughout the building that I had legitimate business. It was, simply enough, the title and crest upon my visiting card that overcame their resistance and caused them to come to attention, salute, and throw open doors for me with flourishes. At last I reached the door in whose bracket rested the card with my dear one's name inscribed upon it. I was rather more than horrified to see two young officers in the ceremonial full-dress uniform of a famous Hussar regiment standing at attention at either side of this door. I could see at a glance that, had it not been for the inflexible etiquette which dictated every line of their bearing, they would have made bold to ask my concern as I was about to knock upon the door. One of them, indeed, did wheel toward me, click his burnished heels, bow, and inform me in rapid, sibilant German that he believed the occupant of the chamber to be engaged. My own German was then extremely deficient, and indeed grew only slightly less so in consequence of my continuous dependence upon it in the course of the ensuing years. I managed briefly, however, to inform the young officer that I was expected, upon which he could but bow again and fall back to his position of attention.

I knocked upon the door and was more than a little amused

to observe the gaping astonishment upon the dull face of the objectionable Dora as she opened it an inch or two. With a forefinger raised slightly in silent warning, I handed the woman my card; and after she had disappeared, waited with my heart pounding in a mingled state of expectation and consternation, since I could clearly hear the voices of my dear one and a man, exchanging remarks in clipped phrases. But almost at once Dora had thrown the door wide for me to enter.

No sooner had I stepped into the room than I realized that something was amiss. I knew how great must be Madame Geyer's surprise at my appearance, yet she extended her hand to me as if she had but seen me yesterday. Instantly I caught her telegraphic message. This was to be a prearranged call upon my part; she had been expecting me.

"*Enfin*," she cried in gushing tones. "I have just been telling this charming gentleman of my long-standing appointment with you!"

The officer beside her, monocled and tightly corseted, miraculously compressed into the extreme of elaborately embellished uniform, drew himself up and favored me with the stiffest of military bows, inclining his cropped head with a jerk as Madame Geyer made the introduction. I did not fail to catch the malignant gleam in his cold, gray eye, which, in its glass integument, reminded me of nothing so much as the orb of a fish seen through the side of a parlor aquarium. Madame Geyer chatted lightly and easily, in a flow of trivia of which I could hardly believe her the authoress. Here indeed was a priceless glimpse of her versatility as an actress! Even the luscious quality of her speaking voice was thinned and heightened to the conventional treble of the woman of society. "And such an unusual contretemps, too," she was saying, "that the one evening when I broke my rule of soli-

tude after singing, I had promised to my old friend from Paris! He is passing through Berlin, you understand. . . ." She looked up from her low stool to bestow upon the angry Prussian a smile of sweetest ingenuousness. "You will be able to explain to his Imperial Highness?"

"*Natürlich, Gnädige!*" barked the gruff ornament of the Imperial Court. "And now I will bid you a very good night."

He clicked his heels, bowed, turned to me, and in guttural French pronounced, "Your servant, sir!" Then he wheeled, and marched with precise heavy steps to the door. The moment it closed behind him Dora slipped noiselessly forward and locked it. My dear one relaxed against the low back of her chair, flinging out her arms in a gesture of abandon. To my silent and horrified question she answered, muttering through her teeth, "The Crown Prince's Equerry." Instantly I possessed the formidable picture in all completeness, but even while I was burning with inward indignation, Madame Geyer sprang from her chair and flew to me with hands outstretched.

"Thank you!" she cried passionately in French. "You have saved my life! Why, I have not had a chance to tell you how delightful this surprise really is—how delightful!" She drew back and looked at me a moment. "I am very glad to see you, Monsieur le Duc!" she exclaimed.

I bent over her two hands which I held in a grip vibrating with emotion. "If you are really glad," I made bold to say, "would you not repeat those precious words for the eager ears of Louis?" She pressed my hands silently and turned to her mirror. "Let us go quickly where we can breathe," she said. "The presence of that brute is stifling me in this room."

In a trice she had made her toilette, arraying herself as on the evening of our memorable first meeting, in the same nun's robe of velvet, with her hair lying close and flat as

Dora had dressed it beneath the wig. She took her cloak from Dora, the same heavy woolen one I had first seen, and turned toward the door. Suddenly she stopped, and seizing Dora by the arm, whispered a flood of words into her ear in a language totally unintelligible to me. I must have shown my surprise, for, as the maid slipped into the corridor to make sure the way was clear—that was obviously what she had been directed to do—Madame Geyer favored me with one of her frequent gamine glances. "That, Monsieur, was my native tongue!" She whirled the flaps of her cloak forward and hurried into the corridor. I knew it to be useless to inquire what the native tongue might be; it sounded like Russian, yet I knew that it was not. I could surmise only that my darling was a member of one of the Slavic races, a novelty in my experience.

When we were inside my carriage she turned to me and said suddenly, "After all, in Berlin you are not at home. We could go to Horcher or Borchardt—but. . . Have you made a reservation?"

I had, indeed, gone so far as to reserve a salon at Borchardt, which I had been assured was a most excellent house, but I sensed that my dear one was not in a mood sympathetic to such an environment, and promptly lied, as I smiled at her, "How could I dare presume that you would honor me at supper this evening?"

"You never presume," was my delightful reward, "and this evening you are a guest in my domain. I have no home, it is true," she murmured, "but I can feel remarkably at home in this forbidding city. Ask your coachman to drive to the Bristol."

For a moment I could not fully realize the privilege that was being bestowed upon my enraptured self—that it was to her own apartment I was being taken. And not until we were

seated near a comfortable porcelain stove in her drawing room, with a waiter whom she called Franz der Laufer, to his vast delight, standing with his menu beside us, did I grasp the full import of my wonderful good fortune. I knew then that Lena Geyer would not have brought me there if she had not accepted the profound extent of my devotion, and that even though I might yet wait through a weary period of longing, divine achievement would ultimately crown my hopes.

Here in Berlin she differed from my fascinating creature of Paris. She was no less fascinating; indeed, she seemed to me rather more so. But added to the scintillance and fragrance of her personality was a new quality, a straightforwardness, an earthiness, simply expressed. She looked at me with the beaming grin I had grown to love and said, "You are my first guest in my new home. This is truly a celebration."

"You have only just come here to live?" I asked her.

"Naturally," she answered. "I have only recently been able to afford it." She glanced about the luxuriously furnished parlor with its velvet chairs and shining grand piano. "I like to be comfortable," she said with an apologetic smile, "but I cannot say I am used to it."

She played the hostess like a child delighted with a new game. She had cancelled the order for her solitary supper and now studied the menu with a frown of concentration. She looked up at her friend Franz der Laufer. "A real Wagner meal tonight, Franz," she said in German, "and tell Dorfmann to send up the big *Weinkarte*."

When the knock upon the door announced that our supper was about to enter, she said to me, "You know, one feels like a gourmet in Paris, of course, but there is something about Germany that makes me *love to eat*."

We were served with a meal absolutely German in origin and execution, which I must admit was superb. It had not, naturally, the finesse, the polish, the inspiration of our French culinary genius, but as a specimen of splendid preparation of fine materials, it was beyond reproach. My ultimate intimacy with every nuance of Lena Geyer's tastes and nature served in many ways to broaden my own. As she had herself said, she loved to eat, which is a step beyond the meticulous judiciousness of classical gourmandise; her tastes were broader, her appetite less demanding of subtlety, and more capable of appreciating the hearty and the robust. She taught me, by degrees, the good features of her own point of view, to such an extent that before many weeks had passed I was drinking and positively enjoying beer, which I had hitherto considered a beverage fit only for servants and foreigners. Lena Geyer taught me that beer has a happy place in the scheme of food and drink, and that a taste for it is not incompatible with a fine *gout* for wines. Further, it was she who initiated my subsequent tremendous interest in the exquisite white wines of Germany; and as a man of taste and justice I only too readily concede that in certain respects they have and can have no peer.

On that evening she chose our wines, a Zeltinger Himmelfreich to accompany the cold entrée—*Vorspeise*, she advised me, was the correct term—of delicate smoked salmon from Norway, with Astrakhan caviar of the finest. With our young goose, roasted, I must admit, to a point of succulent perfection, she had commanded a great Rheingau wine, a Rauenthaler Kesseling of the magnificent vintage of 1895. Once I had overcome my natural astonishment at the service of two white wines successively, I applied myself to a fair judgment of this custom, justifiably necessitated by the limitations of German viticulture. Though a noble Chambertin

would far more richly have enhanced the flavor of the excellent goose, I admitted readily that a noble Rhine wine benefited it infinitely more than a poor red one. Then too, since it has ever been my wish to relieve the priceless name of Frenchman from the onus attaching to the somewhat valid charge of insularity, I was very glad to have this initiation into the tastes and customs of a foreign country. As we were finishing the superlative soufflée that completed our repast, I gazed across at my beloved with a look of frankest admiration. No man could more perfectly and knowingly have chosen the supper we had consumed, nor shown greater taste and knowledge in the selection of the wines. But where any other woman so endowed would have repelled me as too masculine and resourceful to appeal to a man of subtlety, this woman offered a powerfully exciting challenge in the vigor and independence of her nature.

Characteristically her mood changed as soon as the *couvert* had been removed. She leaned back in her chair in a pensive attitude, and remained silent for a long interval, though she had previously shown the greatest animation. At last I made bold to ask her if her distraction was indicative of worry, for I felt only too certainly that such must be the case.

She raised her head from its relaxed pose upon her hand, and gazed at me most earnestly in a moment of silence. Then she admitted in quiet tones that I had divined correctly; she was indeed worried.

"It is, my dear Louis"—how my heart leaped as this unexpected boon fell from her lips—"a question of the utmost delicacy. It concerns his Imperial Highness."

I had divined that her distress had its source in this objectionable personality. In a few words she had explained her difficulty. The equerry of whose presence in her dressing room I had so providentially relieved her was not there at

the instigation of the crown prince himself, but at that of his father the Emperor. As most of the world has learned from those gossips who follow court incumbencies by the publication of secrets properly to be buried in deepest oblivion, the heir to the throne had reached manhood without, so far as could be ascertained, ever having displayed a remote interest in women. His father, upon apprising himself of the truth of this circumstance, necessarily distressful to a royal house, swore in comparatively public circumstances that he would see that his twenty-year-old son soon learned—and enjoyed—the prerogatives of a man and of a prince. The force of this imperial intention had been realized in the previous year when a young American singer attached to the Royal Opera had, rather unwillingly, become the mistress of the young heir to the throne, and had given birth to a son whose appearance did much to satisfy the Emperor. That the royal house treated the young woman with the shabbiest neglect, having deliberately forced her into the arms of its scion at the price of her position at the Opera, was but another revelation of its character.

Quite naturally all members of the staff at the Opera knew of this shocking episode, and it may be left to the imagination of the reader to picture the emotions of my beloved when, that very evening, as she returned to her dressing room, she was informed that the equerry of the crown prince was waiting upon her. She, however, being a woman of wit and tremendous independence, had instantly resolved upon a technique of evasion, to be supported until a moment when she could quietly decide upon a method of contending with this formidable problem. She knew at once that whether or not the crown prince had of his own volition expressed a desire to associate with her, the Emperor would only too readily lend the weight of his authority toward the attainment

of this end. Therefore, she took it for granted that the invitation, actually the command, to sup with Royalty, which she had had the magnificent temerity to refuse, originated in the highest possible quarter. And if so, the consequences of her refusal would be dire indeed.

She described to me the ruthlessness of the Emperor in dealing with any man or woman who opposed him—indeed it is well known that in the mind of Wilhelm, *lèse-majesté* was a graver crime than treason, and that condign punishment was meted to the unhappy man or woman who dared ever to decline one of his invitations. Wilhelm was known to fly into rages so brutal as to indicate latent insanity, for causes less grievous than the one Lena Geyer had given his son tonight. She assured me that she felt confident of receiving, on the morrow, a dismissal from the Royal Opera and a banishment from the country. To my ears, accustomed to the liberal usages of democracy, which, even while I deplored it, I could acknowledge upon grounds of justice, this prediction sounded too preposterous to believe. However, Madame Geyer cited to me the case of the celebrated Italian singer Camilla Lundì, who had been banished from the German states by royal edict for having had the audacity to expect compensation for a command concert, rendered at a moment's notice upon an evening when she was already fatigued after an appearance with the Berlin Philharmonic. I admitted that my dear one's fears were not entirely imaginary. But so vastly did my indignation swell, so fiercely did I struggle to control a verbal outburst of vituperation and disgust toward this royal patron, that I managed only with difficulty to view the problem in the light of detachment.

Appalled by this picture of Lena Geyer, one of the truly eminent artists of her world, ejected in disgrace from her

tenure at the world-famous Berlin Opera, I presently asked what she would or could do in that event to protect her public reputation and assure herself of a fixture as enhancing to her identity as that of prima donna of the Berlin Royal Opera. Would she, for example, transfer her fixed attachment to our Opéra at Paris, which, we both knew well, would have been only too proud and delighted to have received this honor? She explained to me, and I was greatly interested in the inner motives that must direct an operatic career, that while a permanent contract with the Paris Opéra was always a desideratum, it was advisable in her case always to appear there as a guest artist because of her desire to be identified primarily with the music of Wagner. As I have previously noted, this music in Paris was sung necessarily in French, and not even the most vehement Chauvinist could pretend that our Paris performances of the Wagner classics could compare with those at the great German houses. "No," she said, shaking her head, "I could not go to Paris now. I must remain identified with a great German opera house until—" she paused.

I asked her to complete her thought. To what was she, clearly, referring, and to what was she looking forward?

She smiled, with an expression rather more wistful and gentle than I had ever contemplated upon her dear face. "To New York," she said quietly. "To the Metropolitan. That will come in good time, but the time is not yet ripe. Meanwhile, I must work and develop here."

"But if you are denied the opportunity of singing at the Berlin Opera," I protested, "then where, my dear, can you pursue that development?"

"There is but one other house," she replied. "That is Vienna."

"And why not?" I demanded. "Why would the Vienna

Opera not be vastly delighted to obtain your incomparable services?"

"It would have been, some two years ago," she replied, "but at that time I made the fatal mistake of declining the post that was offered me. I did so out of loyalty toward the Berlin Opera where I made my first success."

"—And now?"

She rested her head upon her hand again. "One never receives a second invitation from the Hofoper. It is the proudest musical organization in the world."

I allowed my restless mind to play upon all facets of this grievous question and suddenly, as those thoughts will that are so often destined to have far-reaching and profound effects, two quick ideas flashed across my brain. The first—the universally well-known detestation in which the Austrian Emperor held the German one. The second—that the French Ambassador at Vienna had the heaven-sent grace to be an old and close friend of my dear late father's; our families had possessed neighboring estates for centuries. All in a moment the distressing tangle of facts and emotions seemed to fall into orderly line in my hands. In a few words I apprised my dear one of the simple plan that had unfolded in my mind. No sooner had I expressed it in words than it began to take shape in fact. Taking pen and paper, I wrote in entire detail to our Ambassador in Vienna the whole unpleasant story, not omitting the characteristic behavior of Kaiser Wilhelm and of his heir. I went on to tell the Marquis of Madame Geyer's motives of loyalty, which had influenced her decision to remain in Berlin, and what would be her feeling now if given an opportunity to reconsider her refusal of Vienna. I hardly needed to add, though I did not fail to avail myself of the pleasure of a hint, what a service the French Ambassador might be doing the court to which

he was accredited, should he see fit quietly to act in the matter, and to convey it to the attention of the powers concerned. I closed with a fervent assurance of my gratitude for his intercession, particularly if action could be undertaken with all possible haste, in view of Madame Geyer's momentary suspense. Taking a hasty leave of my dear one, and with all possible speed, I repaired to the lodgings of young Comte Jean-Marie de Savelure, an attaché of our Berlin Embassy whom I had known well during his last tenure in Tokyo. With his assistance I obtained a trusted messenger who was directed to proceed with the greatest speed to Vienna, and to present my letter instantly to the Ambassador, in person.

As I parted from my dear one she had expressed great appreciation of my interest and assistance, and requested me, if I was not otherwise occupied, to wait upon her at mid-morning of the following day. I was of course only too overjoyed to be of service, and to be permitted this intimate participation in her affairs. When I was ushered into her drawing room the next morning she was seated at her desk, dressed entirely in close-fitting black, relieved only by a small ruching of white at the high collar. To me she seemed magnificent; a Norn, a Fate, most awe-inspiring in her pride and dignity. Silently she handed me a note headed by the imperial crest, which informed her that, as the Court Chamberlain, accompanied by the Intendant of the Royal Opera, was preparing to wait upon her at five o'clock that afternoon, she would kindly have the goodness to be at home.

"You see," she said indifferently.

I could with difficulty realize the enormity of the crudeness, yes, the bestiality, that would stoop to such incredible means of satisfying its wounded vanity. But Madame Geyer's attitude was one of superb control and detachment, even though I know how deeply her splendid pride in her

work and her ideals had been injured. Gestures of consolation and reassurance were necessarily excluded from my words to her. Instead, I glanced at my watch and remarked that as it was not quite noon, we had more than four good hours before us in which to take the air—it was a beautiful day—lunch, and otherwise entertain each other in the teeth of these disgusting circumstances. With splendid verve and humor she threw off her cold abstraction and arose from her chair with alacrity, calling to Dora to bring her wraps. I excused myself on the plea of a telegram I must send before our *sortie*, and from a private telephone in the office of the hotel, I communicated with Jean-Marie de Savelure at the Embassy, telling him that if any word arrived from Vienna after four that afternoon I wished to receive it in Madame Geyer's apartment at the Bristol. I then rejoined my dear one, and we took our departure in my carriage for a pleasant enough day out of doors, interrupted by a splendid luncheon with which we regaled ourselves at the justly famous restaurant of Horcher.

It was only the providence of a merciful deity that had permitted my messenger to catch an express that brought him to Vienna by noon of that day. At half an hour after four, my dear one was seated calmly in her drawing room, displaying a poise, a sang-froid, that would have done justice to the haughtiest *grande dame* of Paris. Nevertheless, even a less practised and interested eye than mine could have observed that she was painfully nervous, and with each tick of the clock growing more so. She anticipated the suggestion upon the tip of my tongue, that we occupy the interval with some distracting game, by asking me suddenly if I played cribbage. I assured her that I did, whereupon she requested Dora to bring the board.

However, promptly upon the stroke of five, I withdrew to

an adjoining chamber, in spite of my dear one's request that I remain and lend her moral courage by being present at the interview. I knew too well that the sight of myself in intimate attendance upon her would serve only more to incense the representatives of the Emperor, to whom they would report me as being the primary reason for Lena Geyer's defiance. This was not the case, though I should have been proud had it been so; and I was not willing that some more refined and far-reaching specimen of vengeance be visited upon her because of me.

I must admit that in this entire episode, the woman Dora, for whose existence I was at last beginning to concede some reason, behaved with complete discretion and intelligence. After admitting the Court Chamberlain and the Intendant of the Royal Opera to Madame Geyer's presence, she joined me in the connecting room, and waited with me, as I had directed, for developments. I heard through the door the stentorian tones of the Chamberlain reading aloud a decree of dismissal, without cause, from the staff of the Royal Opera, followed by an edict of expulsion from the kingdom of Prussia. Just as silence fell upon the termination of his grating and guttural words, there was a quiet knock upon the door of the chamber where I was waiting. I opened to admit a messenger from the French Embassy, who handed me a confidential telegraphic dispatch from Vienna. In a word it contained assurance of the highest Austrian authority's delight in this opportunity, and included an invitation to Madame Geyer to proceed at once to Vienna, to join the Hofoper as one of the leading sopranos, with all emoluments and honors. Folding the message, I handed it to Dora with the direction to give it at once to her mistress. Upon Dora's return to me I could not resist the overwhelming temptation to place my chair close to the door and listen to the conversa-

tion taking place between my dear one and her insulting callers.

"I acknowledge peremptory dismissal, without cause, from the Royal Opera at the instigation of His Imperial Majesty," she said in tones so nobly clear and firm that my heart pounded with pride. It was difficult indeed to believe that German was not her native tongue, so fluent and classical was her command of it, so exquisite her inflection. Though I heard it commonly spoken with the spitting gutturals that made it repulsive to the sensitive ear, her pronunciation was the ideal of that language at its best, a best that would have caused Goethe himself to contemplate Lena Geyer with affection and pride. She continued: "I shall proceed immediately to obey the edict of expulsion from the realm. Before I depart, however, I beg the privilege of asking the honorable representative of his Imperial Majesty whether my dismissal from the Opera, and the related circumstances, are to be released to the press?"

I heard the growling voice of the Chamberlain saying, "Certainly not. Certainly not. This matter is of no possible concern to the public."

"Nevertheless," Lena Geyer replied in an even tone, "the Lord Chamberlain will acknowledge that an artist's career depends to no small extent upon the interest and good will of the public, and he will surely have no objection to the announcement that will be released to the press tomorrow by my manager, that I am leaving Berlin for Vienna, where I have been engaged as a permanent member of the Hofoper with all emoluments relative to the status of ranking prima donna."

Until my dying day I shall regret the closed door that prevented my seeing the face of that beastly court puppet as those words fell upon his incredulous ears. My dear one

assured me that his consternation, followed by a wave of fury that turned him scarlet from the base of his shaved neck to the top of his bald pate, was a sight long to be remembered. In a transport of eagerness for him to be gone, I waited palpitatingly beside the door while formal remarks were made in termination of the interview. At last I heard the click of the salon door and the heavy tread of the men as they proceeded down the corridor. Then I opened the door at which I had so unblushingly been eavesdropping. My dear one was still sitting erect upon her divan, with her hands folded and a look of extreme pain and stress in her beautiful eyes. As I entered she rose suddenly and—how can I express the turmoil, the sweet agony, the sacred import of that moment?—threw herself into my arms. Silently I held her close to my heart, my lip pressed to her fragrant hair, my limbs trembling from overwhelming emotion. It is only to be expected that when I found my voice I whispered to her such outpourings of passionate love as I had never voiced in all my life before. The full meaning of that single sweetest moment of my life cannot be conveyed in this medium, nor, to be truthful, do I wish it to be. It must remain forever the secret of my heart.

At last our tears ceased to flow and with my pocket-handkerchief we dried each other's wet eyes and cheeks. I shall never attempt to describe the ineffable delights of the ensuing evening; the dinner in the doubly precious intimacy of her salon; the cold drive in the Tiergarten under a full moon and twinkling stars; the return to her apartment, where I accompanied her by tacit understanding, and from which I did not depart. It was in the last unearthly, tender, tenuous moment before she surrendered to my adoring love that I held her apart from me, gripping her beautiful broad shoulders and gazing deep into those noble, earnest eyes.

"You are not acting from gratitude?" I asked her, hoarse with emotion. "You must not reward me for anything. I have done nothing, nothing in all the world but worship you."

She smiled gently and placed her fingers upon my brow.

"No," she said slowly, "it is not gratitude."

"It may not be love either," I said, "because you have never known what love can be."

"That is true, Louis."

"Then by all that is sacred," I vowed, placing my hand upon her hair, "you shall know."

Chapter Eight

UPON the five o'clock express to Vienna the following afternoon my man Pierre had reserved accommodations for us all. When we entered our wagon-lit salon my dear one could find no words to express her pleasure. My intelligent servant had converted the plain railway compartment into a bower of flowers and a sanctum of little luxuries. Disposed upon the divan was an inviting arrangement of dainty, perfumed cushions. Across its foot lay a rug I had taken time to purchase that morning; a very dream of a travelling rug, confected of palest café-au-lait velvet and lined with mink fur. Upon the table nearby stood the dressing case that was to surprise her as my first gift, a veritable work of art in hand-polished morocco leather, equipped with every possible toilet accessory that elegance could wish, executed in crystal and gold. As I purchased the little treasure that morning Unter den Linden, how keenly I regretted that I had not had the foresight to do so at home in Paris, where I felt that my exacting standards would have been met by even greater perfection! However, I must admit that it would have been the overly critical woman who could have found fault with this exquisitely executed piece. My dear one was more pleased than a child; she seated herself upon the divan, leaned back against the cushions, drew the rug over her knees, broke off a rose and posed it in her hair, held her dressing case open between her hands, and raised her dear face to mine for a kiss that I gave from a heart nigh to bursting for happiness.

It was this thoroughness, this richness and completeness of appetite and participation that held me to the woman I loved with unwavering power. So generous, so lavish was her nature, that once having taken the step of surrendering to my love, she made no petty and commonplace reservations. She did not tease, she did not tantalize. True, in many women's natures such mischievous elements add to their charms, but the playfulness—and how celestial it was!—in Lena's nature expressed itself in other ways, and served equally to spice my existence with the delights of the unexpected. If she, from time to time, hinted at a tender refusal of my ardor, I knew beyond all doubt that coquetry had no part in her motives. She was frankly not in the mood, and at such times I knew that her abstraction might almost invariably be ascribed to the exactions of her art. I learned that a singer above all other women is consecrated to the demands of her physique; that the man who could refuse to allow this inarguable reality to take precedence over his desires would be a fool and a brute as well.

The hours of our journey passed in transports of delight. Ever a brave and a clear-thinking person, my dear one had set her face resolutely forward toward this great challenge that circumstance had flung her way; for while she could not have been said to have entertained great affection for Berlin or for its opera, it was nevertheless closely identified with her beloved Lilli Lehmann, whose teaching had brought her to eminence and perfection, and through whose offices she had received her engagement at Berlin. Lena had gone that last afternoon to Grunewald to take her farewell of her dear teacher, and to explain the extraordinary chain of events that precipitated the flight to Vienna. It would have been entirely within the bounds of possibility for Lena to have appealed to Frau Lehmann to intercede in the matter of the royal edict,

and there is small reason to doubt that the great woman, of whom even Royalty itself stood in awe on artistic grounds, could have brought about a reversal of the imperial decrees. My beloved, however, was both too proud and too witty to concur in such a proposal. At best, her continuing tenure at Berlin would have furnished material for court gossip and professional intrigue; at worst, the Intendant would have contrived, at instigation from high places, to keep her upon the roster of singers, yet never to put her upon the stage, and to prevent her appearing elsewhere. It was far better to do as we had done and in this Frau Lehmann readily agreed. I do know that Lena, in recounting the tale to her, omitted mention of myself and of the small part I had been able to play in the *dénouement*, which was as well in view of Frau Lehmann's inevitable and one may say bigoted disapproval of my part in her pupil's life.

In the morning we reached Vienna, where we were met at the station by the *chargé d'affaires* of our Embassy, who was literally bubbling with good spirits and with exuberance of welcome. In a word, during the drive from the railway station to Sacher's, where suites had been reserved for Madame Geyer and for me, he recounted to us the delight with which the Ambassador's message had been received in high quarters. The disgust aroused in the breasts of the Emperor and of his advisers by the account of the Hohenzollerns' behavior was only exceeded by the alacrity with which they all agreed that Lena Geyer must consent to grace the Hofoper with her presence and her art. The opera director, when consulted, had instantly assured his interviewers that the place he had offered Madame Geyer some eighteen months previously was still most emphatically vacant, and that he considered the acquisition of her services nothing short of essential to this, the foremost operatic organization in the world. Accordingly,

upon her entrance into her suite, she found a large basket of beautiful flowers upon the centre table, together with the card of the Intendant of the Hofoper, who would, he wrote, do himself the honor of calling upon her that afternoon, at five o'clock.

I had directed Pierre to reserve at the delightful Sacher's two suites upon different étages, as I did not wish my dear Lena's initial dealings with her new sponsors to be in any way complicated or affected by her newly initiated relationship with me. Although I had been blessed with the opportunity of bringing about this happy move to Vienna through the fortunate accident of my father's intimacy with the Ambassador, I was convinced that it would be the course of wisdom for me to divorce myself as thoroughly as possible from participation in her professional affairs. To this resolution I clung unfalteringly, expressing opinions only when specifically invited to do so by my dear one. And a wise course it proved to be.

How glorious was Vienna in those unforgettable days of 1902 and 1903! Added to the glamour of fashion, luxury, gaiety, the magnificence of the aristocracy, the elegance of their entertainments, and the abandon of the young bloods in their hours of carousal, was the great and serious glory of the artistic life of that splendid capital. Those were the days of Gustav Mahler's unequalled work at the Hofoper, days when the world's greatest voices and one of the world's greatest orchestras were all gathered under his ægis in that rich temple of art. Many are the discerning men and women who will tell you now, thirty years later, that Mahler's performances of the works of Wagner and Mozart remain unsurpassed in subsequent history; and there are many, like myself, who cannot control their emotion at the recollection of Beethoven's *Fidelio* as he used to conduct it with

my darling in the title rôle. It can be imagined how vast was his delight upon finding himself unexpectedly endowed with the direction of this sublime voice; how warm was his appreciation, and how intent his application, in realizing that a direction given to Lena Geyer was equivalent to the certainty of perfection.

This quick-tempered and difficult man, whose musical ideals were of the very highest, whose work had elicited unstinted praise from the lips of Brahms, and whose standards brooked no possible compromise in quality and execution, became very shortly a staunch friend to my Lena. Where it was his usual fate to quarrel with colleagues, artists, and managers alike, to leave every tenure at the height of his best work because of his inability to co-operate with other personalities, his affection for "meine Geyer," as he always called her, never suffered the slightest shadow. Doubtless the roots of this splendid mutual devotion lay in her ability to meet his inexorable musical standards, and in her serious and willing musicianship, to which most prima donnas have neither the intelligence, the stamina, the patience, nor the humility to apply themselves. Once when we had the pleasure of Herr and Frau Mahler's company at supper he turned to me and exclaimed, "To tell this woman"—pointing at Lena—"something she is to do is like telling it to a messenger from God. You cannot believe it will be done beyond your earthly hopes—but it is!" It can be imagined what was Mahler's joy upon arriving in New York for some guest appearances at the Metropolitan in 1908, to find his Geyer there, assigned to many of the leading rôles; and small wonder that his ensuing accomplishment was memorable.

So kind and so considerate, in comparison with the surly truculence of the Berlin officials, was the treatment accorded Lena by the Intendant of the Hofoper and all his staff, that

she seemed incredulous of her good fortune. When I avowed that it was after all no more than her due, she thanked me for my extravagant opinion but said, with the reality so characteristic of her fine, clear thinking: "Yes, *mon ami*, but remember they have not heard me sing yet!"

Which was not, of course, strictly true, since most of them had at one time or another during the past seasons made it very much their concern to hear her at other houses in Europe. There was some discussion as to the best vehicle for her impending *début*, one of the authorities speaking for Sieglinde, which he had heard during one of her guest appearances at Geneva, and Herr Mahler for Elisabeth, chiefly, he said, because she was undoubtedly the greatest living exponent of the rôle (though he had not yet heard her sing it for proof). So, Elisabeth it must be, since Herr Mahler at that time had the last word in all decisions at the Hofoper. In honor of the occasion she decided that she must have a new costume, which was made with such art and mastery of detail that she vowed Vienna was the only place, hereafter, where she would have her opera costumes made. The crown was quite fine, a beautiful piece of filigree each of whose points was mounted with a large artificial pearl. And for the occasion I presented her with my first gift of jewels, a brooch marvelously conceived of diamonds and pearls, with a very fine emerald in its centre; that stone above all others which glowed in harmony with her eyes, and reflected the vigor and depth of her personality.

She allowed me to enter her dressing room for a brief moment just before the performance, when I found her completely dressed and ready to go on, sitting quietly with the open score before her upon the table, as if she had not already sung the rôle fifty times! But her rehearsals with Herr Mahler had opened new vistas before her, and she was

determined to reveal them with all the power of her genius.

I had not seen my beloved for over twenty-four hours, having only too willingly concurred in her request for absolute quiet and solitude before this portentous hour. Now she greeted me with a gentle smile, almost as impersonal as she would have bestowed upon a total stranger, which I understood quite clearly as being all she could rally for me from the utter concentration of her emotions and forces in another direction. I bent over her and fastened my jewel upon the front of her costume; she glanced down at it with another smile, then whispered a tender word of thanks in my ear, and indicated ruefully her lips and cheeks, heavily masked in grease-paint and therefore not to be kissed as I so longed to do. Instead I embraced her hands, which I noted were steady and firm as they clasped mine, though quite cold, and withdrew, promising to come for her after the performance.

The audience was brilliant beyond the power of my simple pen to describe. The Emperor Franz Josef was in his imposing central box, and stretching about the circle to the right and left of him were all the great nobles of his realm, accompanied by their ladies dressed and coiffed and bejewelled to a degree of elegance that could not have been outdone anywhere, even in Paris. The spectacle of the beautiful auditorium, with its vast orchestra-pit that so honored and featured the incomparable Philharmoniker that played in it, the glittering lights, the rich riot of color from the officers' uniforms, the sparkling reflection of a million diamonds and other jewels, was altogether unforgettable. I was seated, of course, in our Ambassador's box; and he chose to look upon the occasion as the most important event of his season. I had several days previously warned my darling that there was no

way, in the light of courtesy and convention, for me to refuse his invitation and that there would, equally, be no way to refuse him should he request the honor of a presentation to her after the performance. She admitted instantly that the service and honor done her by the Ambassador were such as to make her preference for solitude impossible to adhere to upon this occasion, and that I might bring him if he did her the honor of requesting that I do so.

My impatience during the two scenes of the first act remains to this day a tortuous memory. Though the mezzo-soprano who sang Venus was the first I had heard who did full justice to the part, I could think of nothing and listen to nothing, so passionately was my attention fixed upon my dear one, quiet and calm in her room, where many a woman would have been wild or prostrate with nerves. I did not, however, fail to note the glorious playing of the orchestra, or the magnificent beat and perfection of detail in the conducting of Mahler. I had never heard such playing, and further, had never seen a fashionable audience so completely aware of what it was hearing, and attentive to the last man and woman. This feature of the Viennese musical life struck me in profound contrast to the trivial attitude of society in Paris and London.

During the first intermission the corridors were filled with handsome officers and gentlemen in the height of full-dress elegance, most of them gleaming with honors and decorations, on their way to call upon the ladies holding court in the boxes. Like a child, I trembled with apprehension lest some of them overstay their time and in returning late to their places cause commotion at the moment when the curtain should rise. I need not have worried; when the lights went down the house was quiet as a church, and vibrant with a strong emotion of anticipation that permeated it in every

quarter. Suddenly the red velvet curtains swept apart and there she was—not my darling, not the passionate woman so recently surrendered to my adoration, but the radiant virgin of all the world, exuberant, pure, with joy and beatitude flowing from every line of her face and body. In the brief moment that she stood silent while the orchestra played the introduction with fire and clarity such as I had never heard, there was a tangible thrill of delight all through the crowded house. As the first electric phrase rang from her throat my heart ceased to beat, my limbs grew cold, I might have died for the acute pain of ecstasy and pride that overwhelmed me. She was in her finest voice, and as the evening progressed, I confess to secret speculation whether the initiation of her relationship with me had not somewhere released a flow of new power, new richness, new liquidity and fire into her incredible throat. These were the first notes I had heard her sing since receiving the ineffable gift of her love, and indeed she sang to me with a new significance and glory.

All about me were men and women thunderstruck with delight and incredulity, for it is true that while Lena Geyer always gave a splendid performance, that was one of the nights when she outdid herself, and boldly scaled the very heights of Olympus, carrying her captivated hearers in her wake. Technically, the explanation for her unearthly performance lay in the inspiration of Mahler; never before had she sung under such direction, with such an orchestra. Then too her acting was, as always, so powerfully imaginative and expressive that it struck the new public as a novelty; the reputation that had preceded her to Vienna had declared her the possessor of a historic voice, but had not so fully prepared them for her talents on the stage.

Her triumph was of fullest possible measure, overflowing, and intoxicating to everyone under that roof. She herself

accepted it with the most appealing charm ; as her colleagues in the cast broke the firm convention of the company and repeatedly left her alone before the curtain to receive the wild plaudits of the audience, she curtsied with regal grace, smiling in unaffected delight and finally flinging out her arms in a warm gesture as if to take all Vienna to her heart. Indeed, it might well be said that she did that very thing.

At the conclusion of the performance my host, the French Ambassador, lost no time in expressing his fervent wish to meet Madame Geyer. I told him of the rare exception she was to make to her usual rule, in his behalf, and conducted him backstage, where she was awaiting us. He had no more than bowed over her hand before I perceived an expression of greatest warmth upon his austere and aristocratic countenance ; and when he withdrew to permit her to make her toilette before the supper at which she was to honor us with her presence, he pressed my arm and murmured his admiration in no equivocal terms. "I congratulate you, *mon fils*," he said with the greatest *empressement*. "I should conclude that you must be the happiest and most fortunate of men. That is a magnificent and captivating woman!"

As my dear one was to be, according to her contract, resident in Vienna for at least five months of the year, she decided, from a natural desire for privacy as well as from other motives, to take a flat in a suitable quarter, which I rented furnished with all the luxuries that had belonged to the late member of royalty who had used it when he sought seclusion. This charming little home was situated in that part of the city known as the *dritter Bezirk*, not far from the Schwarzenberg palace and gardens, and close to the great embassies. It was but a short walk to the Ring where it occasionally gave us pleasure to promenade on a beautiful after-

noon, and where I dearly loved to patronize the exquisite shops, with whose wares of jewels and needlework and precious laces it was my delight to adorn my beloved. I am aware that I am not alone among my countrymen in having succumbed to a lively and long-lasting affection for Vienna; it seems to me to be, indeed, the only capital in the world that can compare with our Paris in atmosphere, cultivation, and beauty. In those days it had as well an aura of the most enchanting verve and gaiety.

I retained my suite at Sacher's hotel, where I was made more comfortable than I have ever been away from my own home, and was highly amused at the report rendered by my servant Pierre incident to this circumstance. He assured me that had my own title and birth not been such as to impress Frau Sacher with my close relationship to that gentleman who, in a better world, would be enjoying his divine rights upon the throne of France, she would have remained comparatively indifferent to my comfort, and, under certain circumstances, to my presence in her establishment. She was well known as the consultant and confidante of most of the distinguished nobles of the Austro-Hungarian realm, and it finally came to my knowledge that when a particularly distinguished noble whispered leading questions about the Hofoper's new prima donna into Frau Sacher's capacious ear, she retorted that the lady's affections were already permanently engaged with a gentleman whose blood, though of another nationality, was fully as cerulean as his own!

One most interesting episode marked the early days of our stay in Vienna. After my dear one's prodigious triumph at her début she consented to receive a representative of the press, who sought to obtain such biographical details from her as would lend interest to the comment he was preparing for the perusal of an eager public. I was present at the inter-

view, and could not but feel the greatest interest when the young man, who was mannerly enough, inquired of what country Madame Geyer was a citizen. She stared at him a moment with rather a puzzled expression upon her countenance and presently answered—"Why—I suppose of this one!" My own astonishment was only less great than my curiosity, for the mystery, whether or not intentional, as to my beloved's background and antecedents, had for some time occupied my thoughts with persistence. The amazement of her interviewer was striking.

"Then you are not German, *Gnädige!*" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Not Swiss?" He paused. "May I take the liberty of inquiring where you were born?"

"I was born in Prague."

The young man sat back with an expression of astonishment, slowly superseded by enlightenment. "I see," he exclaimed slowly. "Now the source of your magnificent natural musicianship is no longer a mystery. You are of Bohemian descent?"

My dear one nodded. "I am," she answered. "And I spent my childhood there. Since then I have travelled a great deal and have never thought of myself as the citizen of any particular country. Art is international and the distinctions of birthplace and language should not have any bearing upon the artist's point of view."

"Quite so," agreed her interrogator. "But I think you will discover that upon being apprised that you are its compatriot, your Austrian public will feel even warmer toward you, if possible, than it does now."

"That would be very pleasant," replied Lena, "but I was under the impression that Bohemians were not held in high regard in Vienna, in fact that they refused to call themselves Austrians."

"That is so in some cases, particularly of political zealots," the young man said, "but according to your own words, you have no such feeling."

My dear one nodded.

"In that case," he said, "you will be in a position to enjoy all the popularity of an Austrian citizen without any of the stigma that sometimes unfortunately attaches to the Czech identity. I congratulate you."

So remote were political considerations from my Lena's thoughts! Yet the time was to come when she was to pay dearly for her broad point of view in this regard, and to wish that her identity as an Austrian had never been so firmly and enthusiastically fixed upon her by an adoring public and a gracious Emperor. To me the revelation was fascinating; at last I understood the elusive, tantalizing Slavic strain, the facility in an unintelligible language, and indeed in all other languages, the adaptability to the atmosphere and customs of any country where she might find herself.

I believe it was due more to the single answer rendered by Frau Sacher to her noble interrogator than to any other factor, that Lena was not more avidly sought by the gay habitués of stage door and dressing room. There were many who did hope to be received by her, many and many the beautiful basket of flowers that reached her with the card of some eager prince or archduke. With tact and charm she succeeded in refusing the attentions of all these suitors, never giving offense, never seeming unaware of the honor they wished to confer, never giving me any cause for jealousy or putting me into what would have been a supremely mortifying position—that of contending for her favor against rivals who in a manner of speaking were my hosts in a country that I had entered uninvited. Naturally, such being the nature of gossip

in a cosmopolitan capital, it was not many weeks before those who felt themselves concerned were all well apprised of the status of affairs between Lena and myself, after which I was accepted alone as a matter of course in court circles, to which my name and titles bore unquestionable entrée. At the same time, in her company, I was accepted among the musical people who were her friends. In the ordinary sense of the word, Lena was not a social person; she did not care for random gatherings and she felt at ease only when with me, or in a group of friends all of whom had the same interests as herself. The effect of her personality upon most people who knew her was to cause them to love her extravagantly and demonstratively; if she felt some reciprocal affection she was pleased with their company, but if she were at all indifferent, she found their devotion burdensome and made an especial effort to avoid them.

It would be futile to pretend that there were not awkward features of my liaison with my beloved Lena. It is no reflection either upon her humble birth or upon her conspicuous profession to note that in the days of our happiness, and indeed until the War swept away all the amenities, dignities, and courtesies of a finer world, an opera singer was in no way the peer of a noblewoman or a gentlewoman of distinguished birth. It would have been entirely unthinkable that I introduce my dear one to my honored mother, or to any of the ladies whose charge it was to uphold the conventions and regulations of our cultivated society. It is also true that these ladies existed perforce in a milieu intolerably dull in comparison with the brilliant world of art that I penetrated in order to win my beloved. She, unlike so many poorly advised and ill-conducted of her colleagues, was too proud, too intelligent, and too ambitious in her legitimate field to permit herself to be waylaid by fruitless hopes of admission into

the rigid circles of society into which I was born. She was, rather, oblivious of such circles, and seemed always to take it entirely for granted that if, in visiting a foreign capital, I were invited to dine with royalty or nobility, she must be omitted from the list of guests. That I almost invariably declined such invitations for the reason that I preferred to be alone with her was well understood between us.

It was also understood from those first ecstatic days in Vienna, that I would arrange my affairs so as to be free to accompany her wherever she might go. I grieved at thus sorely disappointing my dear mother, but I had sworn to show Lena what true and tender love might be, and my conception of my duty, as well as my supreme pleasure, in that respect, was to be always at hand. Thus my own life was necessarily as nomadic as hers. For four glorious and precious years, our routine was almost invariably the same. We spent the months from November until March in Vienna. On about the first of April we would make the sweetest and tenderest of all pilgrimages, returning to Paris, where we remained for the two delicious months of spring in a transport of happiness, while she sang at the Opéra. In June and early July we were in London for the Covent Garden season, an interlude that neither of us greatly enjoyed, but which was undeniably important in her career. At midsummer we returned to the Continent, to pass our holidays in whatever spot our fancy might decree; always it was secluded, always in some comfortable house that I rented for the period of our stay, staffing it with my own servants from Paris and Chartres, who possessed as none others possibly could the ability to make us comfortable. From time to time we made journeys to capitals where my dear one was engaged for guest performances; to St. Petersburg, to Stockholm, to Warsaw, to Munich, where her triumph was so uproarious as to reach the

ears of the Emperor in Berlin and cause him to repent his folly of 1902.

As time went on, it warmed my heart to observe the increasing tenderness and demonstrativeness of her feeling for me. As a man of experience I had been only too well aware, upon the inception of our love, that the weight of devotion and expression was all upon my side. My dear one, as I had so correctly divined upon the occasion of our first meeting, had indeed had cause—though I was not then completely enlightened about it—to fear and hate the physical expression of love. Thus I knew how cautiously I must demonstrate that art whose mysteries and ecstasies have no proper place in a published chronicle. I had been correct in my surmise that, once her fear and repulsion were skilfully and tenderly dispelled, she would be ardent, eager, and passionate in the extreme, which proved most rapturously to be the case. Never can I forget the new and galvanic overtone in her divine voice on that initial appearance in Vienna which followed our first happiness; and that, indeed, was long before she had learned or dared fully to respond to my fervent love. As she grew more confident of herself and more trustful of me, she voiced, occasionally, a new fear whose possible basis of reality had never occurred to me; that if she grew too secure, too relaxed, too *normal* (she said) in her relation with me, there would be a corresponding lack of elasticity and fire in her singing.

We were, as God has been good enough to decree that lovers shall be, very sentimental, and among a thousand little ceremonies that endeared this or that day or occasion to our memories, was the anniversary of our flight to Vienna, which had so gloriously precipitated our love. The second anniversary of this occasion fell upon the day preceding one of Lena's appearances at the Hofoper. We had known, some

days in advance, of this prospective interference with the delight that would ordinarily have marked our celebration, but we accepted it in good part, particularly as Lena was to sing Donna Anna, and she made it a point invariably to give her superb best to Mozart. She had been taught to do this by both her teachers, and she considered it in the nature of a rite. Therefore we agreed, perforce, to be content with a quiet early dinner at her flat, after which I should withdraw and she should go at once to bed.

I arrived in good time, bringing with me a jewel that delighted her almost to tears, a broad flexible band, to be worn about her throat, of diamonds and pink pearls. She had chosen to greet me with a new robe, soft and flowing like those she wore after changing from her stage costumes, but fashioned of a pale-colored fabric in contrast to the deep tones of the other gowns it resembled. It was made of velvet in a creamy rose shade that matched exactly the nuances of my pearls. I clasped the ornament about her throat. Never had I seen her look so beautiful, never had her dear face glowed with such tender radiance, and never had I desired her more ardently. Her mood was ravishing—gentle, quiet—the very essence of her wish to make me happy, tempered with the wistful knowledge that I must soon leave her. We partook of our dinner seated side by side upon a small divan in her salon—so intimate and tender were our feelings that we wished not to be separated even by the width of her dining table. That, clearly, was a mistake; so were the truffles that had arrived from France the previous day at my order; so was the Romanée that had been transferred months before from my cellar at Chartres. Pierre waited upon us at his own insistence. The good fellow had grown so devoted to Madame that always when I dined or supped with her he chose to dress me as quickly as possible, then to rush in a fiacre to her

flat where he admitted me with a formal flourish as if he had not, a quarter of an hour previously, helped me into my clothes at Frau Sacher's.

When he withdrew, leaving us to finish our wine, I raised my glass and gazing intently into my darling's great glowing eyes, I pledged anew my love and passionate devotion. She responded in her luscious voice with words far beyond any verbal expression she had ventured before. We embraced; tortured by the burning ecstasy in her eyes, I closed them with my lips; she sighed and drooped upon my breast. In a word, we were lost. Donna Anna faded from our minds, as indeed did all else in the world outside. I rose and drew her, blind with desire, into her chamber.

Next morning she stared at me over her coffee with the round, frightened eyes of a guilty child. She was speechless with worry. Having said once that she was sure she would give a bad performance that evening, and having been silenced by me with the assurance that she must not think such nonsense, she remained silent, thinking it, I knew, all the more. I suggested a drive in the Prater, secretly fearful lest her usual morning walk exact too much of her energy. It was not, however, her muscular energy about which I was concerned.

It would have been wiser had I not gone to her dressing-room for my brief greeting before the performance, but worry drew me there, and for the first time since I had known her I saw my Lena in a state of definite nervous fear. She hardly noticed my presence; she was standing in the corner tapping her foot rapidly as Dora fastened her costume, and attempting to do breathing exercises in which she would interrupt herself to snap irritably at the maid in Czech. Nobody in the world understood Lena Geyer better than that ugly, mysterious, devoted servant, and her

only reaction to the scolding was to throw surly glances at me quite as if to fix me as the cause of her mistress's distress. The woman was no fool, though her manners were atrocious. I withdrew without speaking to Lena and sought my place in the house.

Lena's performance was not good. To be sure, what was poor singing for her would have been most women's best, but she had no sooner opened her mouth than I knew her fears were justified. The average listener could not have told she was below her standard, but I knew, and I was not the only member of the audience who did know. Every singer has her off-days, and one whose record was as flawless as Lena Geyer's would never have been harshly criticised for a slight deviation from perfection. It was not in pitch or execution that she was at fault; rather it was in the quality of her voice, which in some way she failed to project across the footlights with the electric force that the public had grown to worship. *Or sai chi l'onore* was the dramatic aria where she usually displayed her fiery power most dazzlingly. And to my horrified and incredulous grief, Lena did not dazzle that night. I wondered how Mahler must have felt in his pit, for he had grown to rely upon her as upon his own right hand, and to have her big aria merely adequate, well-sung, but not the Donna Anna that always sent the audience away raving must have been a profound shock. Heartsick, I waited for the *Non mi dir*, which went better, chiefly because it demanded less of the artist, and in the reduced scope of her voice that night, she could negotiate it better than the first-act aria. The applause was as enthusiastic as usual, but I did not miss the puzzled expressions upon the faces of certain connoisseurs.

While making my way to her dressing room I resolved that the only way to carry off this emergency was to pretend

that her singing had been flawless as usual. Firm in this resolution, I knocked upon the door and was surprised not to be immediately admitted. After several minutes' waiting, I knocked again. Presently Dora opened the door a crack, peered through it, and with a genuinely terrified expression whispered to me that Madame would not permit me to enter. My alarm and consternation may be only too well imagined. I replied to the maid that this must be a matter for my own judgment and that I felt obliged to disregard the orders of her mistress. I grasped the edge of the door, firmly pushed the maid aside, and entered the room.

My poor Lena was crouched in the far corner upon a footstool, garbed in such remnants of clothing as she had not flung all about the room. She had removed her wig, but not the ugly white bandage to which it had been pinned. This was stained with grease paint and perspiration, and beneath it, from her streaming eyes, there flowed a torrent of tears to mingle with the greases and pigments of her make-up into an unspeakable sight. She was weeping in great racking sobs that tore my heart and filled me with terror, for this, entirely aside from its emotional danger, could only harm her voice the more. She ignored me. She was rocking to and fro upon her stool, moaning and murmuring an unintelligible garble of language which I recognized as Italian and Czech, interspersed with "Oh my God," which she gasped over and over again in English. "*Ah Maestro!*" she would say, "*carissimo mio, scusate, perdonate, Oh my God, Oh my God!*"—and then she would wander off into passionate phrases in her native tongue that I could not hope to reproduce here, rocking this way and that upon her stool and at last burying her face in the greasy towel upon her knees. I knew not what to do. At last I placed my hand upon her shoulder, whereupon she started violently and jumped to her feet. Her weeping

and sobbing ceased instantly. She clenched her fists until I saw her knuckles whiten, and knew too well that her nails were digging into her palms.

"How did you get here?" she hissed in a low, furious tone. "I told her to keep you out. Get out. Get out of here at once, do you understand?"

She advanced a step toward me, and even as my temper rose at the insults she was all too ready to fling at me, I could not deny a thrill of excitement at sight of her, for she was magnificent. Ridiculous as she looked, with her face smeared in streaks of red and blue and black, with her hair wildly dishevelled above the bandage, with her underclothing falling from one shoulder and breast, with one foot bare and with the stocking she had drawn from it tangled in the towel in her hand, she was a glorious incarnation of mingled grief and anger. Her eyes seemed to have dilated to twice their usual huge size, her wide nostrils flared and trembled, her lips were pinched in her determination to suppress her sobs.

"Get out," she said again.

"I cannot, Lena," I replied. "My place is here, to help you."

"I need none of your help," she said, struggling to keep her lips rigid. "Help! My God, can't you see what you've done? This is your fault. You've done this to me!"

"Let us not discuss that now," I said, making a tremendous effort not to let my temper rise, for there are times when no opera singer can fling challenges at a royal duke of France.

"We'll discuss whatever I choose!" she retorted, "and since you have refused to leave me and avoid hearing what I hoped not to say, you shall hear it. You and your love! I never want to see you again. I never want you to touch me.

I ought to have known better than to make a mess of my life because of you."

"You have made no mess," I answered, "and before acting upon your dismissal, I might add that you did not sing badly enough this evening to warrant this extraordinary outburst. You are merely overwrought."

"I am?" she cried. "And pray, who are you to tell me whether I am overwrought, and how I sang? Do you think you know anything about it? You do not. You have no idea what my life is. You know nothing about me. You are a man, an animal, selfish, you only want one thing like all the rest of them. Ah, I could kill you!"

She turned to the wall and buried her face in her arms. My anger had by then risen to a point where I was making the greatest effort not to walk out of the room and out of her life, feeling that, like every vulgarian, she was only showing her mettle as I had seen many others do. Yet, as I turned actually to go, I knew that I was wrong. Whether last night's abandonment had been more my fault than hers was irrelevant. I loved this woman, and I knew that she was both a peasant and an artist. If this was the first time she had displayed the lower qualities of both, I could appreciate that she had never done so before. I removed my cloak and laid it, with my opera hat, upon the divan, seating myself quietly there in a firm determination to ride out the storm. Silence prevailed for some time; she must have thought I had taken my departure. Presently she turned toward her dressing table and began wearily to remove her make-up. Then she saw me in the mirror. She whirled around.

"Louis!" she exclaimed, "did I not ask you to go? Can't you understand that I must be alone? The longer you stay here the harder it is for me."

"It is not easy for me either, Lena," I said. "I want only to try to make you believe that your grief is exaggerated. Nobody had an idea you sang as you think you did."

She laid down her comb and looked at me a moment. Then she began to speak, quickly and with passion but I could see with a tremendous effort to control her temper.

"The point is not what anybody thought," she said. "The point is what I know. I know I can't mix these two things, this—this love—and my work. I knew it years ago, that's why I lived the life I did before I knew you. I love you, Louis, that is the trouble. I am only human. I have learned to enjoy love and you see what I paid for it tonight."

She poured some sherry from the bottle on her dressing table and drank it off. "Other women may be able to combine love and their art, if they have one," she continued, "I cannot. We've talked of this before. In holiday time, perhaps, I could make love and not suffer from it. But not when I'm working."

"This is the first time you have thought you suffered," I pointed out.

"This is the first time I have really sung badly," she corrected me. "But when I practise on a day after you have stayed with me, do you think I don't feel the difference, the let-down, the lack of resilience? Of course I do, and I have been worrying about it. Louis,"—she leaned toward me and stared at me a moment, biting her lips. "Do you know where I think the voice comes from?"

I knew, indeed, and nodded.

"Exactly. I once heard a teacher give a girl a terrible scolding for having a love affair, and I'll never forget what he said to her."

"Yes?"

"It is not pretty," she said, facing me. "He said it could

not come out in two places at once. It came out either in bed or on the stage, and she could take her choice."

"But how can this be true?" I inquired, interested and puzzled. "If it were, no good singer could have love in her life, and yet most of them do."

"It is the greatest of mysteries to me," she said. "I have thought about it. I believe I understand a little. I think it is a question of balance. Up to a certain point, love richens the voice, but after that it depletes it. Yet there must be some love somewhere, at least in the beginning. No virgin would sing as I do."

I asked if she had ever speculated as to the effect of child-bearing on a woman's voice. The discussion had grown increasingly impersonal and I felt it good for her to talk calmly with me upon this subject and perhaps regain some confidence through thorough understanding. She answered my last question after a moment's thought.

"It does not hurt a good voice," she replied, "and in some cases it might be said to improve it. Certainly there are many instances where having a child has seemed to strengthen and solidify the timbre and enlarge the size of the voice." She was completing her toilette as she talked. "I know," she continued, "that in my own case my voice changed utterly after I—" She turned suddenly deathly pale, and clapped her hands over her mouth. She had not missed my start of amazement at her slip. She sat rigid before her table, gazing at me in the mirror with eyes distended in panic. I rose and went close to her, taking her two hands in mine.

"Is that it?" I asked her softly. "You have had a child, and miserably?"

She nodded, too stricken to speak. I gathered her into my arms, kneeling beside her chair. "My dear," I said, "my dear Lena."

I understood now so much that formerly had seemed mysterious. I saw at a glance whole segments of her past that had bewildered or eluded me; I could look back upon her rigid austerity in Paris with complete understanding. I do not know whether she feared that this revelation of her past would repel me and cause me to seek my freedom from our liaison. I tend more to believe that it was purely a question of pride whose abandonment frightened and weakened her. But she clung to me, wordless, conveying with infinite poignancy her appreciation of my sympathy. All was as if the past hour had never been. We both felt strengthened and our love renewed by a wonderful increase of understanding.

Yet, in the carriage on the way to her flat she took my hand, and beneath the street lamp I saw an earnest and serious expression in her eyes.

"You understand now, dear Louis," she said softly. "Let us study how to have our love, and still not hurt my career. That will take wisdom and patience. You have so much of both."

I smiled at her, melting with inward tenderness at the clear, gentle expression of her face. But she spoke further, with some hesitation.

"I shall try to be yours and live for my art too," she said; and then, almost in a whisper, "but I must be fair with you. If I cannot do both, you know what my choice will have to be?"

I bowed my head over her hands and kissed them passionately. I knew, only too well, and with a painful premonition of certainty. I would treasure the more dearly this happiness while it was mine.

Chapter Nine

LENA'S problem was one to which I applied myself with willingness and great interest, for there was no doubt in my mind that, rich and rewarding as I had found her to be, she could not excite and hold me as she did without the inspiration of her fabulous voice. I understood also, sometimes rather better than she herself, how great was her psychological dependence upon the art in which she had made herself supreme. Without it, even with a remote diminution of her prowess, she lost confidence, stature, the vitality that set her apart from all other female creatures of my experience. We discussed all aspects of this question on the tender terms of intimacy that gradually flowered between us. It became clear that for a certain period both before and after singing, if she were to have fullest access to all her splendid physical resources, she must be quiet, inwardly and outwardly, and particularly emotionally; that is to say, she must remain continent. Sometimes I passed a few quiet hours with her on the day of a performance, but more usually I left her entirely alone. For some thirty-six hours prior to her singing I made it a point never to display to her the faintest suggestion of ardor, for if I did she was only too eager to respond. Then, after a performance, she would quickly change to the nunlike robes in which I had grown to find her most beautiful, and we would partake of our quiet supper, immediately after, which she would retire, alone.

Love made her warmer and gayer, more inclined to relax

the strict routine she had long since prescribed for her own good. Quick to see all its wisdom, and fearful whenever she seemed, on some gay impulse, about to break it, I made myself a stern warder for her protection. At such times she favored me with a bantering *petit-nom* that I did not greatly relish; she called me "*mon gendarme*." Since she sang customarily an average of two performances a week, I was thus teasingly appreciated more than half the time. There remained only two or three days when she could live as she chose, and needless to say, it was never easy to adjust the fervor of our impulses and sentiments to such strictly defined requirements. There were times when the exaction took its toll in small fits of nerves and tiny flights of temper, when I learned that the difference between a celibate life and an amorous one accounted for many of my darling's moods. She never actually lost sight of her chosen ideal that her voice and her art must rule her existence, but now she was capable of resenting the disciplinary truth that they did. It was in the grip of this resentment that she showed, for the first time, minute sparks of a temper that I had not previously believed she possessed; where love had expanded her nature it had also sharpened her sensitivity, and at times when she was childish and least in control of her strong will, she could petulantly exclaim that her existence was too difficult, that her career exacted too much and prevented her from enjoying life as other women did who had no talent at all. I seldom replied in protest to these moods, knowing well how passing and trivial they were.

For some weeks after the evening of her poor performance Lena was subdued and preoccupied of mood. I understood that she was living through a period of worry, fearful that her single failure to meet her own standard might be repeated for some less comprehensible cause. She practised much

more diligently, she spent long hours walking briskly in the Prater when I knew it would better have pleased her to be driven there by me. She seemed restless and troubled. Her performances at the Hofoper remained fully, if not more than ever, her very best and her public worshipped her. Nevertheless I was interested, one day when she had invited Herr Mahler to lunch with us at the Meissl und Schadn, a place she dearly loved, to hear him question her as to her visible malaise. She replied to him that she knew not herself the reason for her nerves, except perhaps that she had never recovered from the shock of the poor Donna Anna she had sung.

"But this is nonsense, my child, everyone has poor days—the wonder is that you never seemed to have one before. You are not troubled for fear of my displeasure?"

"I would be if you were to show it," she answered. "But I think my real feeling is that I should be working harder. I have a sensation of standing still."

Gustav Mahler studied her for a moment, then leaned back in his chair, "What you need, Geyer," he said, "is a new part. You need something to put your shoulder to. How would you like to do *Fidelio*?"

Lena's face lighted with a radiance that caused me to feel, I must confess, a twinge of envy; few of my suggestions for her pleasure had ever evoked such delight. She grasped Herr Mahler's hand across the table.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "May I really do it, at last?"

"Why not? I've wanted you to learn it ever since you came here. Get it ready and we'll have some performances for them to talk about!"

Lena had barely patience to finish her coffee, so eager was she to hasten home and start to work. She begged me to dispatch a telegram immediately to Frau Lehmann, which

she scribbled on a leaf of my pocketbook. It read: **MAHLER WANTS ME TO LEARN FIDELIO MAY I PLEASE LOVE LENA.** When I returned from the office where I had dispatched the message she was ready to go home, impatiently drawing on her gloves and smiling at the conductor, who was peacefully finishing his coffee and a large cigar.

"Do not kill yourself, by the way," he growled at her. "Please remember you are to sing your best for me in the Mozart this month."

She grasped his hand impulsively, saying, "Work could not kill me, *Herr Direktor*, please give me lots of it."

She waited only for the permission which was promptly telegraphed to her by Lilli Lehmann (she assured me she would not have dared approach the rôle without her teacher's blessing) and then set seriously to work. This was my first opportunity to watch her learning an entire rôle, and in fascinated attention I established myself in a corner of her salon, where she was barely aware of my presence. Every day her routine was exactly the same, unless she had a performance in the evening, in which case she sang very little, but sat for hours at the piano slowly playing the score. On normal working days she would begin immediately after her morning walk—and now these were walks indeed, not drives in the Prater—slowly intoning about a page of the score at a time. She reduced the tempo fully by half, and used no expression whatever. She devoted herself solely to the structure of the music, telling me once that she attempted to learn as if her voice were an inanimate instrument, to be rigidly disciplined to the exactions of the composition.

As she worked in this way, she accompanied herself roughly on the piano. At any complicated turn or difficult interval she would stop, sing it by itself extremely slowly, note by note, and repeat it precisely ten, fifteen, or twenty

times. Next she would gradually increase the tempo until it matched the still retarded time in which she was studying the score. Lastly she would sing through the whole passage, including the particular block she had mastered. In this way she broke up the great arias so much as to make them unrecognizable, and often she went from one fragment to another without any apparent logic, skipping from scene to scene or from the last act to the first. When I asked her the reason for this, she explained that she managed in this way to divest the music of its emotional sequence, and to force herself to regard it strictly for its technical exactions. She said she would not approach the emotional projection of the character until she had so mastered the score that she had an unshakable groundwork of correct music upon which to build her impersonation.

"And then I will go to Frau Lilli anyway," she added. "You did not think I would dare sing this without working with her first?"

I implied that I should not have thought that any coaching or instruction could be better than that of Mahler himself. She assured me I was quite right, but that while Mahler could feel Beethoven and feel his own conceptions, neither he nor anyone else could feel the soul of Leonore as Lilli Lehmann had. I entertained a private conviction that my dear one was fully as capable as any woman alive of working out her own interpretation of the great character, but I honored her none the less for her humility and the simple eager passion of the student with which she applied herself to this consecrated work. During these weeks of study she refused to be entertained in any of the pleasant ways to which we had grown accustomed, abjuring her luncheons at Meissl und Schadn, and the little suppers at Schöner's or Sacher's, in which she usually took such pleasure. Instead I was sur-

prised, one evening, to find her sitting up in bed with the score of *Fidelio* open on her knees, and a chunk of dry black bread in her hand, which she was gnawing as she read.

"My darling!" I exclaimed, "what, pray, are you doing, and where did you obtain that formidable piece of bread?"

She looked up at me and laughed. Her face was innocent of cosmetics, and her brown hair curling around her beautiful shoulders was tied about her head with a narrow pink ribbon. She looked sixteen.

"I am reverting to my childhood," she explained. "This is the real way to work, and this is my supper tonight. I made Mitzi give it to me from the servants' table. I grew up on this."

Nor would she touch a morsel of the delicious Tournedos or a drop of the Château Margaux that were served to me. She was studying the spoken text and I spent the whole evening lying back in an armchair beside her bed, while she recited the beautiful recitatives in the rich low voice to which I could gladly have listened forever. She was learning not only her own lines, but the whole opera. She did this habitually in all works in which she appeared, but not with the definite intention she applied to *Fidelio*. She had ever a phenomenal memory, such that I never knew her once to have recourse to the *souffleur*, and indeed her colleagues frequently assured me that with Lena Geyer upon the stage, all felt confident of a faultlessly smooth performance because, as they put it, she was a walking score in their midst.

After learning the recitatives of the whole opera, she began to sing her part slowly, from beginning to end, with minute attention to every shade and particle of the composer's directions. Now she worked up from the rigid basis of notes she had so carefully mastered, through every separate detail; phrasing, breathing, accents, pauses, the exact shades

of color demanded by the *fortes*, *pianos*, and all other directions. One day when she paused to rest after an hour's work I asked her if she had not really known the music of Leonore very well before she ever inaugurated this rigorous course of study.

"Well, of course I did, *mon cher*," she answered. "How could I not know it? I have heard Frau Lilli sing it, and other women, and you could hardly spend nine years around opera houses without having heard *Fidelio*."

Then why, I inquired, this triply earnest study, as if she had never heard the opera before?

"That is just the way to study," she explained. "To clear one's mind of every previous idea and impression, to start absolutely from a bare slate, and to write on it only and exactly what the composer wrote. If I relied merely on my familiarity with the music, I might turn out any odd person's misconception of *Fidelio*, instead of Beethoven's wishes about it. I cannot know what those wishes are unless I work with this intense attention to the score."

At last she decided, after about four weeks of study, that she was ready to go to Berlin and work on the impersonation, the acting, and the emotional creation of Leonore with Lilli Lehmann. Mahler pretended to be annoyed when she asked for a three weeks' leave of absence from the Hofoper, right in the middle of the season. But secretly he was vastly pleased. No other prima donna of Lena Geyer's standing studied with the unaffected and intense humility that she showed, none was so amenable to valid instruction, none so rewarding when the work was done. He thought, I believe, that she was slightly exaggerating her intensity of study by going to Berlin to work with Lehmann when he would only too gladly have worked with her at home, but she refused to sing the part unless she were given time to study with her

own teacher. Therefore she prepared to leave, and I, as a matter of course, told Pierre to prepare my things for the journey. But she placed her hand upon my arm and begged me to request Pierre to leave us for the moment. When he had gone she explained apologetically that on this occasion she felt it would be better if I allowed her to go alone. She wished to revert, she said, as completely as possible, to the austerity, the solitude, and the celibacy of her student days, in which period she had learned her greatest parts. If I were to accompany her the whole spirit of the journey, and the product of her time, might be changed from what she hoped to make it. At first I was loath to concede this point, and expressed my wish to accompany her just that she might not be subjected to long hours of solitude.

"Those hours," she said, "may not be pleasant, but they will be the making of this part. I must have them, my dear."

Accordingly I placed her upon a train to Berlin, not without grave misgivings over her going there, but she assured me that the Emperor's ridiculous edict of expulsion was by now a dead letter and that, in any case, nobody would dare molest her or question her so long as she was a guest of Lilli Lehmann at Grunewald. It was as I embraced her just before descending from the train, and bade her a reluctant farewell, that I realized how long it had been, though in apparently casual circumstances, since I had had my darling to call all my own; since I had possessed her. It was over a month—from the day she undertook the study of *Fidelio*.

I journeyed to Paris in the interval that my dear Lena was in Berlin, and rejoined her upon the Vienna Express after her three weeks of study were finished. She looked radiant, reposeful, and calm, with a fresh, virginal expression upon her face. She said she had not had nearly enough time with

Frau Lehmann, but that both felt, with the intensive work behind her, that she was ready for her rehearsals with Herr Mahler. She was so absorbed in her part and in the plans she had heard from Mahler for an unparalleled production, that she seemed hardly to realize that we were together again. That night when I took her in my arms, she was at once responsive, yet helplessly reluctant, and I sensed immediately that my love and my wishes were an intrusion that she was too loyal and affectionate to confess. I asked her if she wished the assurance that I would hold my desire for her in abeyance until she had completed her rehearsals and the premiere of the *Fidelio*. She gazed at me for a moment with an expression of the most exquisite tenderness, then with tears in her eyes drew my head to her breast and murmured, "You do, you do understand everything. Dear Louis, I do not deserve such generosity."

Mahler had not heard a note of her work while she was studying in Vienna, and as soon as she returned from Berlin he called the first rehearsal in one of the upper rooms at the Hofoper. Lena permitted me to accompany her there, and it may be imagined with what eagerness I awaited the result of her labor. Only the principals of the cast, Mahler, the *correpetiteur*, and myself were in the room. I was seated in a far corner, as much out of the way as possible. I thought it fabulously gracious of Mahler to permit my presence, knowing well that he was breaking one of his strictest rules out of his peculiar regard for Lena Geyer. The rehearsal began, and I had only to listen to the beautiful work of the soprano and tenor who sang Marzeline and Jacquino to realize that this would be, indeed, a cast with which Mahler himself could find no fault. Then followed the brief recitatives in the entrances of Rocco and Fidelio, and Mahler signalled for the quartette, *Mir ist so wunderbar*. Naturally

it was unformed, there was much for him to criticise, correct, and improve; but I, who had never heard this music before, was struck to the core of my being by its unearthly, incredible beauty. When I remarked this later to my darling she nodded but said "Wait. You have heard only the roughest suggestion of it. Wait until you hear it with the orchestra."

It had been planned to work on the whole first act that afternoon, but Mahler was so deliberate, so precise and painstaking of detail, and so exact in his directions to the singers, that the afternoon was spent before the great duet of Pizarro and Rocco was finished. The moment had come to adjourn, but even as he consulted his watch, Mahler looked up at my darling who stood near him. There was a warm expression on his severe face. She smiled at him and then at me in my corner. She knew what to expect.

"Are you too tired?" the great conductor asked her, with his watch in his hand. "Could you do the *Abscheulicher*—just to give me the picture?"

"But certainly," she exclaimed, nodding to the *correpetiteur*; and drawing a little away, she allowed herself space in which to simulate her entrance, as he began the stirring recitative. I had heard, one may remember, every note of her preparation of this, from the unrecognizable first analysis to the last careful review before she left to join her teacher. Yet I was totally unprepared for the electrifying thrill, indeed the shock, of her glorious tone as she delivered the classic phrase, *Abscheulicher, wo eilst Du hin!* Her colleagues about the room drew back close to the walls with awestruck, expressive glances at one another. Mahler's eyes narrowed, his head came forward on his shoulders, and he stiffened in his chair. When she finished the last phrase of the recitative and paused as the pianist played the opening bars of the *Hoffnungsaria*, there was a faint sigh about the

room. She stood poised with her eyes fixed on the far wall. Then she drew an imperceptible breath and began to sing

*Komm Hoffnung, lass den letzten Stern,
Den letzten Stern der Müden nicht erleichen.*

She had proceeded no farther than that noble phrase when I felt the tears coursing unheeded down my cheeks and realized that never in all my treasured experience had I known her voice to speak so movingly. From the moment of my first experience of it, this piece of music remains for me the noblest height of song. I cannot express the grandeur, the purity, the profundity with which she invested it; above all, the boundless, encompassing warmth of that great and true woman, who sang it as no other human ever could or ever will. The majesty of its lines fitted her like a cloak, and the formidable difficulties of its intervals and cantilena vanished in the fabulous ease and smoothness of her singing. When she finished, the room remained long in silence; at last there was a faint and fluttering "Ah!" from the dumb-founded singers who had doubtless had the greatest lesson of their lives. Mahler sat motionless with his face supported in his two hands, as he had been listening. After a time he drew himself up, looked at her with no effort to conceal the emotion in his countenance, and stretched out one hand to her with a helpless gesture. She took his hand and pressed it. Then he stood up and motioned vaguely to the other members of the company. "Enough for today," he growled, and stalked from the room.

The rehearsals continued intensively for three weeks, though my dear Lena was required to sing much other music during that time. I remember how warmly I admired her wonderful powers of concentration as she would either lose herself in, or necessarily lay aside, her intense absorption

in *Fidelio*. She seemed unaware that life contained any other thought, personality, occupation, or diversion. She was ever tender and affectionate with me, but so abstracted that I hesitated to intrude upon her preoccupation lest the interruption be a rude shock. She was extremely particular about the costume that was being made, determined at once that it should blend unobtrusively with those of the men, yet naturally desirous that her figure appear to advantage. I assured her that in comparison with all the women I had ever observed, she alone had no cause for concern about her appearance in this male disguise; her limbs were slender and shapely, her figure and carriage superbly erect. When the costume was finished she looked heroic in it.

Musical initiates and devotees have written far more eloquently than I could concerning the *Fidelio* performances under Gustav Mahler at the Hofoper. They have gone down in operatic history as unexcelled and unparalleled; his interpretation is thought to be the ideal, his training of the wonderful Vienna Orchestra prodigious, and the cast that sang under him, headed by my darling, has remained without peer. In a capital so passionately devoted to music as Vienna it may be imagined with what eagerness and excitement the premiere of this production was awaited, and long before the opening night no power on earth could have procured admission to the sold-out house.

I was never in the habit of accompanying my dear one to the opera house, as she preferred always to be alone with Dora before singing, but I usually stopped at her dressing room for a moment to kiss her hand before going to my seat. When I entered, ten minutes before the performance on that memorable night, she seemed so calm, so controlled, so perfectly at peace that I marvelled anew at this side of her character. Only about trifles did she ever show excitement

in a superficial sense; the graver the moment, the calmer her manner. Yet there were signals for one who knew her well, in the slight flutter of her nostrils as they dilated, in the enlarged and darkened pupils of her eyes, and in the chill of her hands, which she kept quietly clasped. How I admired her in the severe breeches, boots, and jerkin of the noble Leonore, with her own brown hair dressed in a club in the eighteenth-century fashion! She looked more truly regal, and more her most ideal self, than in all the crowns, robes, and jewels of her other rôles. There was a wonderful glow beneath the pigments of her make-up, and she whispered to me as I bent over her, "Frau Lilli is here! She arrived this morning. Is she not an angel?"

I admitted readily that the great woman had done her favorite pupil a signal honor, but could not deceive myself as to the envious twinge that caused me a moment's pain. Everything seemed to be conspiring to draw my beloved farther from me, into the one realm of inspiration from which I must, in a large measure, be excluded. However, this was her greatest night, and I sternly forbade myself even a passing expression that might mar her triumph and her delight. I made my way to my box convinced all anew of the greatness and supremacy of the woman whose life was part of mine.

Gustav Mahler had no sooner raised his baton and whipped out the first four breath-taking measures of the overture than we thousands in the audience knew, as one mind, that we were present at the making of history. Four measures for full orchestra are a minute fragment of music, yet it is possible for them to set a keynote of performance that one will never forget. So it was that night and, too, at all his subsequent renderings of this incomparable score. I have been told that he produced the same effect when, on March the

twentieth, 1908, just two years after this historical Vienna evening, he conducted *Fidelio* at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, with Lena Geyer proudly upholding the standard the two had created in Vienna.

The performance proceeded upon the highest plane it has ever been my experience to witness. Perfection could not have been more minutely achieved. And, withal, the fire and soaring inspiration were untrammelled, the sense that this monumental thing was rising like flame in our midst from the brain of the living Beethoven. Never have I heard music so perfectly sung as the quartette, which, like the heartrending Prisoners' Chorus, was hushed, tense, breathless, and subtle beyond all words. The cast was so fine that each member added immeasurably to the glorious total; and for once in my experience I was content to listen as the other artists bore out the development, rather than chafe with impatience for the appearance of my darling. From the moment of her silent entrance, and of her subdued participation in the quartette, the audience settled into worshipful tension, and when in the first-act trio she declared her bravery and high devotion in the noble phrase,

*Ich habe Mut, mit kalten Blut
Will ich hinab mich wagen,*

her auditors swayed toward her in a very rush of exaltation. Surely she had never sung so divinely before, and surely she can have sung no better since. She herself was proud to call that work the highest achievement of her career.

Throughout the performance, she gave, gave of herself and her limitless resources with magnificent, awe-inspiring generosity. Great tones like peals of a celestial organ came from her glorious throat. Each note in her register seemed more incredibly beautiful than the last; and when she soared

into the B at the climax of the *Hoffnungsaria*, and poured, rather than held it at the height of the formidable scale, I thought I must cease to live, so overwhelmed was I with emotion. Yet even more was to be borne (for it was, in a sense, a matter for endurance; it was too blindingly beautiful) when she reached the great climax of the second act, and held the snarling Pizarro at bay with her pistol while she cried *Töt erst sein Weib!* I have never witnessed such blood-curdling drama upon the stage, heightened to the last degree of tension by the stirring measures of the trumpet for which singers and orchestra held their moment of telling silence.

And then came the duet, the passion of reunion, renewed life, hope, and ecstasy with Florestan. I pray I may be pardoned if I felt the minutest twinge of proprietary pride in the utter conviction with which she clothed her measures of joy and love. No woman could have created this who knew not whereof she sang; and Lena Geyer did know, for which our all-too-short years of bliss were not in vain. But how, how can I hope to convey the soaring joy in her voice as she sang *O namenlose Freude!*, the authentic and overwhelming passion in her words, *mein Mann an meiner Brust!* How subtle and tender was her transformation from the resolute, tragic Fidelio with her dangerous secret, to the released, rewarded, and meltingly feminine Leonore, restored to her beloved's arms!

Quite surely a comparable triumph for all concerned has never been duplicated at the Hofoper. The audience remained standing and cheering, stamping, beating its hands together, shouting itself hoarse, as the cast, with Gustav Mahler in its midst, took an interminable succession of curtains. The ovation would have continued indefinitely, had it not been curtailed by a not unexpected order for Lena Geyer

to repair to the Imperial box. There she received from the hands of that ruler who was, after all, her sovereign, though she seemed never to realize it, the highest decoration it was possible to bestow upon an artist, with the title of *Kaiserliche Kammersängerin*. From my own box I was able to see quite clearly the noble grace with which she acknowledged the honor, and the perfect curtsey which, even in the boots and breeches of her male costume, she invested with ineffable charm. After the Emperor withdrew there was more cheering, shouting, throwing of flowers, and bestowing of wreaths; and finally, at a very late hour, I was able to make my way through the excited public crowding the corridors to the stage passageway. I had expected to find my dear one alone, and was looking toward the infinitely sweet reward of taking her at last in my arms. But I found I had been preceded to her sanctum. As I opened the door I saw a handsome, black-clad woman seated upon the divan; and before her, kneeling on the floor, with her dishevelled head buried in her visitor's lap, my beloved—in tears! She raised a flushed and streaming face to me as I entered.

"Here," she gasped, between sobs, "this is Louis, Frau Lilli."

The splendid-looking woman raised her small, severely coiffed head and gazed at me for a moment with an expression of frank inquiry. She was, in a word, subjecting me to critical scrutiny, and in the light of subsequent events I fear she found me at fault. At the moment, however, she bowed politely and extended her right hand. The circumstances were hardly such as to permit of formal amenities. Lena, with her arms around the waist of Lilli Lehmann, was sobbing like an exhausted child, and giving way to a rush of emotion that completely astounded me. I had never thought she would so abandon her habitual control. I also thought

I knew her better than anyone in the world, and was amazed at her abandonment in the presence of another person. Frau Lehmann took the situation in command, as I understand it was her habit to take the helm of any development in her life, and spoke to me as if I were a stranger, though she knew, of course, everything of my identity.

"She is overwrought," she said, putting her hand on Lena's hair, "and I think she should be put to bed as quickly as possible. Can she leave here just as she is?"

My carriage was waiting outside, and with it, I knew, a tremendous crowd of Lena Geyer's worshippers, whose custom it was to await her exit from the stage door, to greet her there with clamorous cheers, and to receive roses from her bouquets, which she pulled apart and threw to them. I knew that she could not stand this demonstrative ordeal in her present condition, wherefore I told Frau Lehmann that it would be better if we could slip out from a door on the other side of the building, where I would have the carriage ready.

"Very well," Frau Lehmann replied, "but four of us cannot go in one carriage, and Lena must be quiet. I shall go with with her in one carriage and you two"—motioning to Dora—"can bring the flowers in another."

May God reward me for the iron control with which I smothered the rage that engulfed me! I had not yet so much as touched my Lena's hand, and here was this woman, planting herself like an oak between us, and calmly disposing of me along with the servant and the flowers! Lena must have known of the instant wrath that blazed within me, but she was too exhausted—even had she not been too attached to Lilli Lehmann—to protest. I bowed—very coldly, I remember—and went to make the arrangements and direct the carriage to the small side door from which they were to escape.

We wrapped Lena in several cloaks, put a warm shawl over her head, and quickly led her under the stage and out the passageway on the other side to the carriage. Meanwhile Dora had been putting the mountains of flowers into a hired fiacre at the stage door, and I joined her after my dear one, in the custody of her duenna, had rolled away. How black with rage I was! Yet, as I boiled with resentment all the way to her flat, I was constrained to concede the striking and vital personality of Lena's great teacher. Why was it not natural that she should take command at this time and in the opera house?—and why, I was forced to admit too, was it not natural for Lena to wish to be with her on this evening? Deeply as I had immersed myself in the web of my darling's career, and glad as I was to have done so, I felt for the first time that my choice was not entirely one of delights, and that I could not hope to possess her always, free of conflicts rooted in this matter of her allegiance to her art. Still exalted by the inspiration of her music, but with foreboding in my heart, I drew out my key and admitted myself to her dwelling.

Chapter Ten

As I look back upon the years of my happiness, I am constrained to marvel that so few distressful elements ever threatened the harmony with which my dear one and I were blessed. As a man of wisdom and experience I have not failed to remark the vast difference between the relationship of marriage, based on fact, dynasty, property, and regard, and of such a union as ours, the flowering of the greatest of human emotions. But a flower, as contrasted with the sturdy oak, must early wither and die, and must in its very delicacy be subject to a thousand adverse winds and blighting droughts. Though the exercise of reason has ever appeared to me the highest function of the cultivated man, and though reason dictated to me the awareness that our lovely bloom must some day fade away, I hoped nevertheless to keep it alive and fragrant for many long years, by the exercise of my fervent devotion.

After the premiere of her historic *Fidelio*, in February, 1906, my beloved relaxed to a certain measure into her former tenor of happy passion and endearing calm. But when I took her once again to my arms, after more than ten weeks of deprivation in the cause of her great work, I became instantly, though reluctantly aware of a change in her response to me. There would have seemed, to the average man, no less warmth, tenderness, alacrity, and earnestness in this fabulously rewarding woman; but to me, attuned to the faintest echo of her every mood, an abstraction, an in-

finitesimal preoccupation drifted across our ecstasy to mar its accustomed perfection. This, of all things, was the one of which one could not speak and could not question; clearly it was indicated that I should redouble my efforts for her happiness and confidence. I applied myself with all my heart to doing so; and such was the status of affairs when we made our annual journey to Paris for her season at the Opéra.

Here at last we could be children in my own lovely world, and once removed from the stern and, I thought, overstimulating influence of Mahler, and from the super-challenge always represented by him and the works he chose for her to sing, Lena became much more her old self. Ah, what heavenly days we enjoyed in those two precious months, the most beguiling, endearing of all gifts of the good God to mortals—April and May in my beloved Paris! Now I heard no stern intentions as to dry black bread and the stimulation of solitude. Now I was not forced to stride, secretly protesting, beside her as she took her rigorous daily exercise in the park. Now my horses were brought back to town from their long exile at Chartres, and my carriages polished to a mirror gleam by the rejoicing Rouart and his assistants. Now my noble Charet presided once again over the kitchen of my dear one's flat in the Rue Monsieur, and my worthy Jules poured for us the rarest treasures of my forefathers' cellars, riches too precious ever to be dispatched to us in Austria. Now our most famous restaurateurs welcomed us once more with beaming countenances, and vied with one another for the coveted prize of our favor, while the greatest artists of the Parisian couture addressed themselves to the happy challenge of weaning Madame away from her predilection for the Viennese modistes. I celebrated the fourth anniversary of our meeting in her dressing room by bestowing upon her—

when, as chance would have it she again sang Elsa in *Lohengrin*—a tiara of perfectly matched pearls of royal size, which Cartier at my direction had been assembling for many months past. I shall never forget her queenly beauty when she wore this, together with a pearl-embroidered white gown by Callot, every line of which remains graven upon my memory.

I thought myself again the most fortunate of men, and that the winter of my discontent, which had nevertheless been the greatest of her career, had been dispensed us by Providence only to make our delight the sweeter now. In June we travelled to London for three weeks at Covent Garden, and at the beginning of July we retired to a beautiful house that I had rented high upon the cliffs above St. Tropez. Here we were to spend two months, enjoying the blue tropical Mediterranean, the golden sun, the wealth of fragrance and color, and the seclusion afforded by the unfashionable season of the year. We were waited upon by my own staff from the Château, and a beautifully leisured, tender, and relaxing life we led.

After some two weeks, however, my Lena one morning drew me down beside her as she reclined upon the terrace in a bouffant peignoir with her coffee and her mail upon the table nearby. She informed me that she had received a letter from Frau Lilli Lehmann in Salzburg requesting her to come there for the month of August, and appear in the Mozart festival that was of all things nearest to Frau Lehmann's heart.

"Of course you will not go," I said comfortably. "Frau Lilli knows how hard you have worked recently and how important it is for you to have your rest. This was a gracious gesture, merely."

After a moment's silence my Lena looked at me with

peculiar depth and earnestness in her eyes. She said, "I must go, Louis. I wish to."

I could not trust my ears. Could it be in any way possible that my dear one, my beloved upon whom I had fixed all my hopes of happiness, perhaps with the very intensity that foreboded my fear of losing her, would go forward to meet this destructive intrusion, rather than do her utmost, as I would, to keep it at bay? It is not my nature to protest in words any situation that can better be dealt with by silence or by action; yet in this case I felt that neither of these resources could be adequate to express my concern. I must speak.

Drawing upon the philosophy with which it has been my aim to arm myself in all crises of life, I began to point out to her the mistakes she would make if she were to insist upon jeopardizing her strength in doing this extra work, interrupting the idyll to which we had both looked forward as the re-creation of our best selves, and giving a month of her time to this bit of idealism where hard work and much honor would not compensate for the absence of a financial reward. To all she listened in silence. At length she looked up and began to speak.

"I have feared for a long time that this would come," she said slowly. "If you do not understand why I must go, I cannot explain to you. Do you realize that Frau Lilli might well have asked me at any time in the past four years, yet that she has refrained? Do you know why?"

"No, my darling!"

"Because she is a very wise and patient woman. She has known me well for years. She loves me, as I love her. She would never have wished to cut me off from any fullness of life or richness of expression, so long as I continued to sing well. When she knew that I was happy with you, and yet did

full justice to her ideals, she would not have deprived me of the holidays I had with you while she was doing this noble work in Salzburg."

"Then why has she intruded now?"

"Because she knows perhaps better than I what my life and my work must be. She knows that a few years of care-free holiday are all very well—but that we are destined for greater and sterner things. We—I mean myself, and her, people like us. Louis"—she leaned forward and pressed my hand impulsively—"I don't want to leave here and spoil your summer. I am happy to stay. But I cannot, don't you understand?—I must go."

"Are you under such an obligation to Lilli Lehmann?"

"Only in so far as the obligation is to myself. Oh, my dear, let us not go into the whole question. You have known from the very first that everything could not be ideal. Do you remember the night of the awful Donna Anna, when I reserved the right to make these decisions? You understood then."

And, in all truthfulness, I wanted to admit that I understood now. Yet I could not. All my instincts rose to fight for this woman I worshipped, to keep her beside me, and to prevent the intrusion of her other world which must mean the destruction of ours. I felt a surge of resistance in my heart, and I said "Lena, I do not wish you to go."

She gazed at me in vast surprise. She puckered her brows and bent her head slightly as if she had not heard aright.

"*You do not wish me to?*" she repeated slowly. "But I have already said that I must. I am going. I must sing at Salzburg, it is my duty."

Alas for our little minds and little memories! Though I had won her with my passionate assurances that no duty or obligation must ever tinge her motives in yielding to me,

nevertheless I heard myself say: "Your duty to your ambition, perhaps. Have you no duty toward me?"

She raised her hands slowly to her face in an incomprehensible gesture. I thought it was grief, that she was about to weep. But in a moment she turned to me and I saw a flame of deep anger lighting her vibrant green eyes, causing her passionate nostrils to tremble, her lips to set rigidly, and her throat to pulsate visibly before my eyes. She was very pale.

"So long as you make the effort to understand me," she said hoarsely, "I have some duty, some debt of honor to you. The moment you call my work intrusion, my ideals mere ambition, you release me from any duty I might feel toward you. I feel nothing now, Louis. Please go and leave me alone. I shall start for Salzburg tomorrow. Please have Pierre tell Dora to begin packing."

"You shall not go!" I thundered, leaping from my chair. All my reticence, all my poise and reason, were consumed in a blazing passion. I stood before her, heedless of what I said. "You shall not go," I repeated. "I have not stood in the background of your life for months—for this. I have not given up my life, my friends, my mother's serenity, my family's hopes, all my freedom, my home—for this! What am I?—a lackey, to be conveniently on hand when useful, and dismissed when in the way?"

To this outburst she made no answer. She merely stared at me and then arose from her chair and began to walk toward the house. "I think you are beside yourself," she said.

I spent a most hideous day, struggling with the vestiges of my anger, mortified by my own disgraceful outburst. Lena remained in her rooms, knowing quite well that I would not seek admittance. In the hallways I observed her maid Dora moving to and fro, packing her effects preparatory to

the journey. I knew that Pierre had gone to the railway office to arrange for her transportation. Toward evening when I knew the servants were all below at their tea, and that she was alone, I climbed the exterior stairs to her balcony and found her lying upon a wicker divan, with her face toward the sea. I drew a chair beside her and said, "Lena, I should like to go to Salzburg with you."

She considered my words for some time. I watched her face, slowly growing softer, her eyes melting in gathering tears. Presently two of them welled over and slipped down her cheeks. She extended one hand to me, which I seized and kissed passionately. But she said, "Louis, I must go alone. I should have thought so before this morning; but now I am sure. I don't know what will come of this. I can't tell what I think. Last winter when you were so understanding during the *Fidelio* I thought nothing could ever separate us. Now I don't know. We had better consider this journey a trial of our union. If it is good I will come back to you and everything will be as it always was. If not—we must find out."

So she left; and I remained alone in the house on the cliffs while she was absent in Salzburg. I had ample time, indeed far too much, for retrospection, yearning, and ominous thoughts. I was forced to realize that while no other mid-summer engagement could have torn her from my side, my dear Lena had not hesitated to answer the summons of her great teacher—nay, to go to Salzburg to sing I knew not how many difficult performances entirely without remuneration. True, the Archduke Eugen had lent Lilli Lehmann's Salzburg Festival the lustre of his patronage, the support of his resources, and the services of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra—but Lena Geyer was never an artist who sang for the favor of royalty. I knew she had gone solely at the behest of her artistic conscience and the loftiest instincts of her

ambition—which was exactly what made my deprivation so difficult to bear. No mitigation dispelled my mood of profound depression, not even the brief notes that my dear one wrote me, full of amusing anecdotes about the Festival. In those days it bore no resemblance to the augmented and internationally popular celebration later promulgated by Max Reinhardt and his associates. It was entirely and authentically Mozart, the operas sung in the charming old baroque *Stadt-Theater*, and every note and detail under the personal supervision of Lilli Lehmann. She sang in all performances, ever prepared at a moment's notice to step into any part, even if it lay beyond her range. Once upon running into difficulties with the casting of *Die Zauberflöte*, she notified a recalcitrant tenor who was rehearsing Tamino—"Take care that I do not dismiss you and sing this part myself!" Lena added that she could well have done so.

It was impossible to resent the influence of such a great personality over my dear one, but wherein it threatened to come between us I was keenly on my guard. I could never believe that my union with the only woman I ever truly loved would terminate; such was my romantic ideal, the while I forced myself to regard matters in their true light, from the viewpoint of a man of the world. When she returned from Salzburg, and stepped from the train at Nice to my waiting arms, I scanned her dear face for any signs of possible change. There were none, I thought; and yet I knew too surely that my joy at our reunion was not matched by an equal emotion in her. She was tender, her great eyes glowed with warmth and affection, she was eager to relax at home with me, to revel in the seclusion, the luxury, and the gay small intimacies that flavored so much of our happy life together. But the fire that had nourished us so long was burning out.

When we returned in October to Vienna she informed me that she had decided to sing the *Siegfried* and the *Götterdämmerung* Brünnhildes, upon which she had worked with Frau Lehmann in the early mornings at Salzburg, before they undertook the occupations of the day. "Had you no rest at all?" I asked her.

"Quite as much as I needed, my dear," she replied, "I have had enough rest in the past five summers to last me for the five to come."

This was tantamount to an announcement that henceforward she was planning to spend her summers at Salzburg with Lilli Lehmann instead of in France with me, and when I showed by my appalled silence that I felt the blow, she stooped suddenly, took my head in her arms, and kissed me passionately, gazing as she did so into my eyes. "Ah, dear Louis!" she sighed. Only too clearly I sensed the struggle that was taking place in her mind and heart; but this was no time to bring matters to a head, and I resigned myself to waiting, and to trusting that my devotion would eventually outweigh the strong forces that were drawing her away from me.

I would not have believed it impossible for her glorious voice actually to improve in quality, yet at her first performance of that season under Mahler, when we had returned to Vienna, it seemed veritably to have done so. She sang Sieglinde, that part above all others in which the ineffable feminine in her rich nature came most to the fore. Though she had prepared the two ensuing Brünnhildes, she had refused to consider that of *Die Walküre*, clinging as long as she might to the wonderfully human tragedy of Sieglinde.

Matters came far more suddenly to a head than could have seemed possible. All at once we had upon our hands a series of crises, and I cannot forget those early winter

days of 1907, when the sun threatened never again to appear, when my beloved Lena was protestingly confined to her bed with one of the few colds I ever knew her to suffer, when problems beset us at every hand, and when disaster to everything I valued became increasingly imminent.

By far the most distressing, to her, of all the misfortunes—indeed, what seemed an unmitigated catastrophe—was the impasse which loomed between Mahler and the directorate of the Hofoper, developing out of a personal grievance held against him by a certain famous tenor. As is all too well known, Mahler's combination of irascibility and uncompromising standards had ever made him an extremely difficult man to work with. Those singers who preferred the tinselled laurels of superficial applause and individual acclaim to the serious satisfaction of great musical accomplishment were rebellious and mutinous toward his wishes. Though he was nominally the General Artistic Director of the Hofoper, the cabals that operated against him were close to Royalty and to the intriguing powers who could, as Mahler could not, command the last word in administrative matters at the Opera. When these powers demanded from Mahler an apology to the tenor who had precipitated the crisis, the great man flung his directorship in their faces and quit the Hofoper forever.

It can scarcely be imagined with what towering fury my Lena received the news of this disgraceful scandal. She paced her salon with long, nervous strides, her hands clenched, her lips compressed, her hair dishevelled, and her eyes, I could almost swear, shooting sparks of rage. Only once before, when she believed herself to have sung badly under Mahler, had I seen her in unbridled temper; but now the burden of her indignation on behalf of a beloved preceptor made her awesome. She opened her mouth from time

to time, and I, sitting nearby and conjuring my wits for ways to pacify her, waited palpitatingly for her words. They did not come. Helplessly she strove for expression of her outrage, her disgust, and of her loyalty to the great director. Futilely I pleaded with her to lie down once more upon her divan, where she was convalescing from the cold that had kept her off the stage for more than a week.

"What difference does it make now?" she cried. "You don't think I would set foot on that stage again, do you?"

"But I do," I answered. "After all, you are bound by contract. You must sing."

At that she whirled round and gazed at me with the wide-eyed excitement of sudden discovery.

"But I'll cancel the contract!" she exclaimed. "I will not sing at the Hofoper!"

She might as well have struck me a fierce blow across the face, for even as she pronounced these rash words I knew all too well that she was in earnest, perhaps even more so than she realized. I knew in that moment that somehow, deep within the blind instincts of her being, she had reached a crossway, the end of a clearly defined road. I sensed in one premonitory flash the swift events that were to propel her irrevocably toward a strange world in which I had no part. Naturally I urged myself not to be so serious, to realize that this was but an instant of high emotional tension. I put out my hand to stop her as she strode to her desk and seized her pen. She shook me off and, standing, scrawled on a sheet of notepaper a few words, which she passed to me. She had written:

To the Directors of his Imperial Majesty's Hofoper, it is announced that the connection of Lena Geyer with the Hofoper is hereby terminated, in protest against the treatment accorded the Herr General Direktor, Kapellmeister Gustav Mahler.

I urged her vainly to reconsider this hasty impulse; in any event not to dispatch such a note until she had given the matter several days of thought. She shook her head vigorously as she placed her letter in an envelope, sealed it carefully with red wax, and rang for Pierre, whom she directed to take it immediately to the office of the Intendant at the Opera. When he had gone, she brushed the tips of her fingers as if to remove every trace of the business. I pleaded with her further, but she only grew more stubborn.

"Nothing," she said firmly, "nothing in the world would induce me to change my mind."

It was only to be expected that the directors of the Hofoper should wait upon her in a body, which they did very shortly, and a bewildered and protesting group of gentlemen they were. My Lena received them calmly and graciously, had coffee and Wiener-bonbons served them, and when they began, one by one, to urge her retraction of her announcement, she listened courteously to each, only to answer him briefly with politely worded regrets. At last when all had had their say the Intendant asked, "There is nothing, then, *Frau Kammersängerin*, that would induce you to withdraw your resignation?"

"Only one thing," she answered with a grave smile, "and that would be the complete vindication and reinstatement of the *Herr Direktor*."

The gentlemen regarded one another hopelessly, slowly shaking their heads and pursing their lips.

"That, we regret to say, would be quite impossible," they informed her.

"In that case then," she said rising, "I really do not see the need for further discussion. There is nothing more to be said."

"Just one thing remains, *Gnädige Frau*," the Intendant

said as he bent over her hand, "and the attorneys for the Hofoper will be on hand to say it tomorrow. I bid you good afternoon."

Lena threw me a quizzical glance, with one eyebrow raised, as this ominous announcement fell upon our ears. But when we were alone she shrugged her shoulders. "Let them sue me," she said carelessly. "I can afford it."

"It might be much less expensive to come to a settlement with them," I ventured.

"I'm sure it would," she said with a yawn, "but it occurs to me that there will be a little world-wide publicity over this matter and that never hurts an opera singer. By the way, dear Louis, would you be so kind as to ask Monsieur le Marquis at the Embassy who is the best attorney in Vienna?"

I need hardly record in these pages that there was indeed "a little world-wide publicity" as the result of Lena Geyer's break with the Hofoper. The matter never came to court, because public sentiment in Vienna was so strongly on the side of Mahler, and therefore upon that of my darling, who was considered to have done a magnificently daring thing. The directors of the Hofoper did not wish to give the press opportunity to amplify the matter. A settlement was reached and my dear Lena paid a very large sum of money for the privilege of exercising her moral indignation. Indeed, I could not stomach the terms of the agreement, and positively suffered at the size of the sum she was required to pay, but that in itself seemed to her only a justifiable feature of her attitude in the affair. When I pointed out that she had in a manner of speaking ruined herself in this cause, and left herself with a very small reserve of funds, she smiled wisely and said "Look at these."

And, in the sheaf of telegrams and letters she handed me were enough offers of guest appearances throughout Europe,

at maximum fees, to guarantee her a larger income for the rest of the year than she would have earned at the Hof-oper.

"But next year," I pointed out anxiously, "and the next? Surely you must have a permanent appointment somewhere?"

"Surely I must," she agreed, "but suppose we wait until summer to decide about that."

I could not believe, as the servants set about dismantling Lena's beautiful flat, and packing all our treasures for shipment to Paris, where they were to be stored, that the end of our precious five years' idyll of Vienna had come. As this etching came down from the wall, that clock from the mantel, the Sèvres cups from the tea-table, all to disappear into the packing boxes, my heart suffered bitter wrenches, each more painful than the last. Each tick of that little clock, every flower on the teacups, bespoke a warm and tender memory. I had purchased all these beloved little treasures for her delight and to adorn her home, just as I had assembled linens, laces, beautiful tableware, luxurious robes and cushions, a thousand exquisitely tasteful appurtenances of our life together. I have not hitherto dwelt upon the peculiar and the only really unfeminine element in my dear one's nature, which was that she was singularly devoid of feeling toward a home. She had no care for the myriad objects that give it its intimacy and character, no interest whatever in its administration and the arts of housewifery, and no sentiment about its associations. She was indeed sentimental but only in the matter of her personal feelings, not where she could be fixed in a literal attachment to a place or to things. On the other hand, I have ever had a most intense attachment to my home—really, to my homes—to my house in Paris, to Chartres where I was born and where every tree and stone

and chair and tapestry has its secret meaning for me, and to the dear little sanctuary in Vienna where the most divine hours of my life were spent. I realize that the vast gulf of birth and background which separated me from my beloved was the basis of the great difference between us in this respect, yet I experienced the faintest twinges of regret that she could be and remain so free of the safe ties of the normal woman.

Thus it was I who grieved and winced as the work of—I felt—destruction went forward. Lena was so preoccupied with her complicated plans for a week in this capital, a month in that, that she hardly noticed the confusion and the increasing desolation around her. Only for her opera costumes did she show the slightest concern, and she spent one whole day with Dora and the large black notebook in which her gowns and accessories were inventoried, carefully checking every detail. Several new costume trunks were ordered, and all the costumes of thirty or more rôles assigned to their proper places. Six new wigs must be made, twelve pairs of shoes, two dozen sets of the undergarments she wore upon the stage, and I fail to remember how many complete new costumes, for she assured me that once away from Vienna she was most unlikely to return, though she still felt the art of its costumers and dressmakers to be unparalleled. Not being a child, I did not call her attention to each bare wall and denuded little table as the servants finished their gloomy work, but I suffered the demolition of my castle of happiness in silence. She was too sensitive not to realize what I felt, but after making, once or twice, a visible effort to attune her mood to my subdued one, she astonished me, toward the end of that fantastic week, by leaping suddenly upon a chair, stretching out her arms as if to embrace the whole world, and bursting into Elvira's scintillating cadenza, *Un Eden*

quegli antri a me from *Ernani*—which I did not even realize she knew. I had never heard such a superb bit of coloratura singing from her throat, and almost dropped the tiny marble Venus I was carefully handing to Pierre. I must have gazed at her in consternation and alarm, for she stopped singing, jumped from the chair and ran across the room to me. She threw her arms about my neck.

"Forgive me!" she cried. "Dear Louis—I am a beast. I know how you feel. I feel it too—but differently. I am all excitement!"

"And your heart does not ache at all?" I asked, putting my finger under her chin and tipping up her face to me. "You have no regrets for our happiness here?"

"I never have regrets for anything, my darling!" she exclaimed, her eyes flashing. "I feel—everything—but I must look ahead. I want to look ahead!"

"Even to uncertainty?" I asked her. "Even to all this mad travelling and living in trunks and portmanteaux?"

"I love it," she cried eagerly. "I haven't known what was the matter with me lately. I must have been bored. I love to travel. I'm a gypsy. I think this is wonderful"—and seizing a travelling rug from the top of a china barrel she flung it around herself, leaped once more upon her chair and began at the beginning of the glorious aria—*Ernani, involami!*—"Ernani, fly with me!"

Chapter Eleven

THUS began the last half-year of my happiness. And, to be truthful, there was many a day and many a week during those six months when my heart lay heavy in my breast, when my mind was uncertain and bewildered, and my will unaccountably paralyzed. For, once she had cast off from the anchor of her Vienna tenure, my dear Lena seemed to initiate a corresponding freedom from responsibility and establishment in all her ties. Her nature was too fine, and her emotions were too sincere to permit of her misleading me by demonstrations of affection she did not feel; on the contrary I am very sure she felt warmer toward me, if anything, than before. Yet her warmth had a feverish and excited quality, an element of suspense and mystery, which at the commencement of a love affair might be the most desirable of attributes, but in our circumstances made me very uneasy.

From Vienna we travelled first to Berlin, where Lena wished to spend a few days in consultation with Frau Lehmann. There were many offers to be considered, many tentative plans to be discussed. We took an apartment at the Bristol, which of all buildings on earth retains the strongest sentimental association for me, but I remember that when I was directing Pierre to stipulate her old apartment of 1902 for us, she placed her hand on my arm and earnestly requested me not to engage that particular suite. Astonished, I asked her why. She looked very serious.

"We must never try to recapture or re-create, Louis," she said earnestly. "Everything must go forward. Every experience must be a new one, a fresh start. If we ever thought to duplicate the experience with which those rooms are associated, we could only be disappointed. Please don't let that happen."

Though I inclined to shrink from the import of her words, I knew she was right. We had three or four happy days in Berlin, but days not unmarked by a certain growing distraction in my dear one's manner. Often she sat with me at table or in a carriage, ostensibly listening to my conversation, or even speaking herself, but at the same time revealing a vague, far-away gleam in her eye, and a peculiar, absent expression in her face. This was particularly noticeable when we were together immediately after her return from one of her daily visits with Frau Lehmann, who was stirring my beloved Lena's ambitions, not only in the direction of new and unconquered fields, but by appeals to her to renounce all the ties that bound her to her present way of life. The very first time I had seen Lilli Lehmann, seated in Lena's dressing room at the Hofoper, I had sensed instantly the full import of her attitude toward me. I knew she considered me at best an unfortunate attachment of Lena's, at worst a calamitous obstacle to her career. Though I felt, as a just man, obliged to admire the great woman for her standards and her artistry, it was only to be expected that I dreaded and feared her as an influence over Lena. She epitomized everything from which I wished to keep Lena apart, and it was not long before a profound, though silent and hidden struggle was taking place between us—each resolving to hold Lena to the allegiance we wished for her, by subtle and tacit demonstration of its advantages.

We journeyed to St. Petersburg after Berlin, where Lena

was to make guest appearances for three weeks at the Maryinsky Theatre. I believe her triumphs were nowhere greater. Though there is a close racial connection between the Slavic strains of the Czech and the Russian, my dear one had grown so cosmopolitan, both in her art and in her viewpoint, that she retained nothing of an original racial identity; yet there was an opulent, luscious quality in her voice that was as truly Slavic as brilliance is native to a Latin throat or profundity to a Teutonic one. It must have been this, as well as the magnificence of her stage personality, that so completely captured the Russian nobility, who were, with the exception of a scattering of wealthy bourgeois, the only part of the populace fortunate enough to hear her sing.

I was not particularly happy in Petersburg. Where I should have wished as always to be quietly alone with my dear Lena on the evenings when she was not singing, I found myself beset with invitations from royalty and nobility in which she, of course, was not included. It had been my custom invariably to decline such invitations, but now she began urging me to accept them—for no reason, I could see clearly, except that she really wished to be alone. Rather than intrude in such circumstances, I betook myself to the palaces, the theatres, and the prodigious suppers, heartily bored with the barbaric ostentation and thoroughly disliking the food—which, with the exception of the caviar and the zakouskis, I considered impossible. Never have I seen the rarest vintages of our great champagnes consumed in more prodigious quantity, and never had I believed more sincerely in the sound, gratifying worth of the noble Bordeaux and Bourgognes that these dissipated Orientals could not appreciate.

Perhaps it was because of the strained condition of my nerves, and because of my uneasy preoccupation with every

detail that concerned my beloved, that an inchoate suspicion which I had for a long, indefinite period entertained about a certain identity became at this time an actual awareness of it. During a performance of *Traviata*, as I surveyed the crowded house through my lorgnettes from the box of the Grand Duke Vladimir, I observed that a single seat toward the front of the stalls was occupied by a young woman who contrasted sharply with the magnificently gowned ladies about her. Attired in a severe black costume which completely covered her arms and shoulders, simply coiffed, and without jewels, she could hardly have avoided appearing conspicuous in that glittering company. As I focussed the lenses upon her I was stirred by a peculiar conviction that this was not the first time I had so regarded this person. Upon making some effort of memory I believed, though I could not be positive, that I had seen her or her counterpart both in Vienna and in Paris during the past year. I thought this to be the case chiefly because of the strange familiarity of her presence in that particular location in the audience. Moved by growing curiosity, I counted the rows and located her seat in the sixth one, slightly to the left of the centre. I resolved from now on to watch this region in any house where my dear Lena was singing, to ascertain whether my surmise about the young woman was correct.

Only a few weeks were required to determine that my suspicion was grounded in fact. We travelled successively to Warsaw, to Munich, to Stockholm, to Copenhagen, and this young woman did, indeed, follow Lena Geyer from place to place. The curtain never rose upon an opera in which my dear one was cast that this strange person was not seated in her usual stall. I realized that such a seat, invariably in the same location, would not be easily obtained in the royal opera houses of Europe unless its purchaser were possessed

either of considerable influence or of ample means. The young stranger was clearly eccentric, for she was invariably unaccompanied, and a lady does not go alone to the opera in a stall unless she is eccentric indeed. Her costume, always unvarying, likewise suggested unusual disregard of convention. I took it for granted that this, like hundreds of others, was a young woman with, as the Germans say, a *Schwärm* for Lena Geyer, who had sufficient tact not to force herself upon her idol—which was most unusual. I asked my beloved if she were aware of this state of affairs. She shook her head.

"No," she said. "You know very well I never see anyone in the audience." Then she paused, with a puzzled expression. "As a matter of fact," she said, "I have heard people around the opera house mention something of the sort. I never pay any attention to *Schwärmerei*. I suppose, though, it's the person who sends the flowers. I never thought of it before." She shrugged.

This fitted into the pattern of probabilities. I remembered that during the Paris season of 1905, when I stopped one evening in my darling's dressing room, I had noticed upon the divan a very large, indeed, an enormous florist's box filled to overflowing with beautiful yellow roses. Though jealousy was my furthest motive, I could not restrain some curiosity as to the source of this very lavish gift. I made bold to inquire of my Lena as she put the final touches upon her make-up. She assured me she had no inkling of the sender's identity, and picked up a card from the dressing table which she handed me. It bore neither name nor message, merely the initials "E. deH." written in a fine hand. We had laughed about the little mystery and greatly enjoyed the beautiful roses in Lena's salon, and I thought no more of the episode, which was of the commonest sort in Lena's daily

life. Yet before every performance, from that time forward, a florist's box would be delivered in the dressing room, usually containing some small, fragrant bouquet, and always, upon my dear one's initial appearance of the season upon any stage, a mass of yellow roses. We decided, I remember, that "E. deH." must be a young French nobleman, though exactly whom, even I, with my intimate knowledge of Parisian society, could not say.

Eventually we took the unfailing floral gift of "E. deH." for granted, and even grew into the habit of speaking of it as part of the routine. Once in Vienna when no flowers had appeared up to curtain time Lena actually became distressed; she insisted she had grown to regard the mysterious flowers as her good-luck omen and she was afraid to go out upon the stage without receiving them. However, just as she left her dressing-room door, upon the call boy's final knock, a breathless florist's messenger burst into the corridor and all but flung himself upon her in his haste to deliver the flowers before she went on. It seemed he and his bicycle had become entangled in an accident with a runaway horse, the original flowers quite broken to pieces, and he had had to return to the shop for more. Once I suggested to Lena that she attempt through the florist either in Vienna or in Paris to discover the identity of her unknown worshipper, but she turned a surprised stare upon me and exclaimed, "Why, Louis, my dear, I could not do that! This person wishes to remain a mystery; how unfair to spoil it!"

At the time, I was content to accept this rebuff, but now with all my senses sharpened to intrusive matters, I determined to disregard my beloved's wishes. When we reached Paris—and only the good God knows with what fervent relief and adoration I thanked Him for our return there—I went privately to the manager of the Opéra and asked him

to ascertain for me the name of the solitary young woman in the sixth-row stall. He demurred slightly, but in Paris I am, of course, always the master. Presently he furnished me with the name. It was Elsie deHaven, and he informed me further that the young woman was an American. Here was my mystery solved; but as such things do in life, this matter became all at once a major and a distressing concern. I accompanied my dear mother to an afternoon of her old friend, the Comtesse de Rancelles, and had not been long in the salon when Madame de Rancelles presented me to her "American niece," as she put it, Mademoiselle deHaven. Even as I touched the fingertips of the young woman, I sensed a certain minute tension in the air, emanating from the fine-drawn intelligence and well-bred reserve of the people surrounding us. Instantly I felt that each spectator was secretly murmuring the name of my beloved Lena Geyer, and as I raised my eyes to those of the young woman whose hand I had just kissed, they met, despite her suitable shyness, a level glance of cold and comprehensive inquiry. I confess readily that this look was answered on my part with thorough and clear-cut dislike. We bowed briefly and she moved away to another group of people.

I felt as if a cold hand, nay, the fin of a cold-blooded creature of the sea, had swept over my heart. I brushed away this foolish notion and devoted myself to my mother's old friends, but each time the young woman—who kept at the greatest possible distance from me—crossed my line of vision, I felt again the same sensation of dislike, of tension, yes, even of foreboding and fear. In a word, if she were as unnatural as my acute feelings seemed to be urging me to believe, then her worship of my darling Lena could be construed only in the most horrible light; and I boiled with fiery determination never to allow the two to meet. This anxiety

coming upon the heels of all the distressing events of the past months produced in me a truly shocking nervous condition, and night after night I sat in my room after bidding my dear one good-night in the Rue Monsieur, grappling with the maddening, heart-rending aspects of my problem, seeking and striving to find a way out. Even then it occurred to me that the time might have come for me to offer to release my beloved from her alliance with me, but in the same breath I would realize that such a prospect was too intolerable to be borne. Also, at this very time of uncertainty and suspense in her affairs, she might at any moment need me more than she ever had before, and I wished in such a case to be unfailingly at hand.

Toward the end of the Paris season, when we were preparing to go to London for Covent Garden, I ventured to ask her the question that was uppermost in my mind, and I felt—though she had consistently avoided reference to it—in hers also. This was the matter of her plans for the coming year. Munich, Dresden, Paris, and Brussels had all offered her contracts upon the most advantageous terms, yet she had accepted none, and seemed to be waiting, calmly enough, for I knew not what to develop. I asked her pointblank when she was going to make up her mind. She gave me a long, rather shrewd look. Then she said,

“Not until after the Metropolitan’s representative has come to Europe this summer.”

The blow had fallen in earnest. I knew then with absolute certainty that my days with my dear one were numbered, and that she was definitely planning to go away across the water, to a world in which I had no part and indeed could wish to have no part. In profound sadness, with the cold hand of fate heavy on my shoulder, I prepared to accompany her to London; prepared, too, for the inevitable parting that I had

decided neither to precipitate nor to forestall. I would yield to the dictates of destiny.

In London it was impossible to simulate a joyfulness, an alacrity, or a spontaneity that neither of us felt. I was, I think, grave, tender, considerate, and scrupulous in my devoted attendance. She was thoughtful, gentle, and courteous. Yet each of us strained under the rapidly increasing burden of taut nerves and hypersensitive feelings. I know very well that it was, during the first ten days in London, more than once upon my lips to initiate the conversation that must terminate our liaison; yet each time I restrained myself, feeling that it was more the part of a man such as I to allow the first words to come from her. Looking back upon it, I believe I was crediting her with a degree of poise and savoir-faire that she had never really possessed, that she hoped that I would relieve the tension, and when I failed to do so, grew more restless and frightened until at last her nerves reached a state of desperation. I must, with an aching heart, record that she resorted to brusqueness, cruelty, and visible shortness of temper. Alas, if I had only allowed a firm inherited pride to have its way with me, and to dictate my withdrawal from the situation, I could have saved both of us from distress. Instead, I was motivated by a peculiarly stubborn determination to force her to act; and this was the state of our emotions upon the evening in June when, after she had sung—and so beautifully!—the Contessa in *Nozze di Figaro*, I repaired to her dressing room to escort her to her hotel.

As Dora swung the door open for me to enter, I restrained a sudden impulse to recoil, for there upon the divan, sitting quietly and gazing into the mirror before which Lena was dressing her hair, sat the American woman, Elsie deHaven! Never in all my life have I experienced a shock quite so distressing in its import, and only the natural sang-froid of

a man of experience prevented my revealing the anger and repulsion that I felt. Yet even in that strange, highly charged moment, a flash of morbid intuition passed from me to the black-clad young woman; a warning that we had never met before. She was not a person of subtle intelligence, I imagine, but she gathered and accepted my meaning, for as Lena presented me, she bowed impersonally and, with suitable tact, turned away to occupy herself with a vase of flowers, while I bent over to address Lena.

My beloved—and despite the memory of that painful moment, and of all the pain she ever gave me, she remains my true and only beloved—looked at me over her shoulder in the mirror and said with a nervous staccato I had never before remarked in her voice, “I do hope you’ll forgive me this evening, Louis; I’ve asked Miss deHaven to come back with me for supper.”

My very marrow froze as I heard these words; not only could I not protest, but nothing would have induced me to do so. It was not her rude treatment of me that so shocked me, as the knowledge that she had somehow met this woman of whom I believed only the most unpleasant things, and that she wished to associate with her. I made no attempt to conceal my displeasure, but bowed coldly and remained only to inquire if she wished me to drive them to the Savoy, or to leave my carriage for them.

“No, thank you very much,” Lena said, busying herself with a manicure implement, and I could have groaned in the realization that she did not trust herself to look at me. My Lena, my great, free, noble, fearless creature, reduced to this! I bowed, murmured my respects, and departed, to spend a most bitter evening in contemplation of my ruined happiness, alone with a bottle of cognac and an odorous British coal fire.

Only a few days more of torture remained for us to mete each other. My detestation of her American worshipper emanated not so much from jealousy as from actual fear of the nature of her attachment to Lena, though I have since received assurances from reliable persons that that fear was unfounded. Indeed, in all honesty, I must confess that even at that time I was not certain of my secret accusation. The more I observed the American, the more I realized that she was too young, too unworldly, and actually too much a lady to be guilty of an abnormality that I had first unhesitatingly fixed upon her. It was more a case, I decided, of a wealthy, solitary, and intensely suppressed woman who was finding the outlet for her entire emotional existence in worship of her ideal. But even this mitigation of my fears was no salve to my wounds. Two or three times in the ensuing week I found the American present when I entered Lena's salon, and it may be imagined with what consternation I contemplated such a development in the life of a woman who had chosen for five years to have no intimate friend of either sex, and no companion save myself.

Thus sorrow dogged my steps in those last days of June. I realized that the Covent Garden season would be over in a day or two; that summer was upon us; that Lena had made plans to join Lilli Lehmann in Salzburg without so much as consulting me about my own; in short, that the break was a *fait accompli* in every respect but the verbal one. I had, after a sleepless night, made up my mind to take the initiative at last, when there was a knock upon my door, and Pierre admitted to my bedroom my dearly beloved Lena, attired in the smart tailleur in which she was dressed for her walk from the Savoy. (On that last sojourn in London, we had, by tacit agreement, not lodged at the same hotel.) She came up to my bedside with the old fine, free stride, her

great green eyes frankly and clearly holding mine, her strong white hands outstretched to me.

"Louis," she said, in the richest cadences of her beautiful voice, "I have come to say good-bye."

She sat down upon the side of the bed, keeping my hands clasped in her own. For a long moment there was silence.

"I thank you for your courage, my darling," I said. "This has been difficult for you."

She bowed her head and I felt her tears dropping slowly on our clasped hands.

"I am so ashamed," she whispered. "I have been such a beast. So cruel, so unworthy of you."

"There is no kind way to break a heart, my Lena," I said. "I do not think we would have been spared much had you done it suddenly."

She wept silently for a time. Then she spoke, very quietly: "You know why, Louis. You have always known, have you not?"

"Yes," I answered. "I have always known you would take flight from my heart. But I have always hoped you would not have to."

"I must," she replied. "I cannot help myself. I am driven, forced—you understand me, my dear?"

"Perfectly. My only sorrow is that I thought you a super-woman—that I had found the great artist who could be the great love as well."

Slowly she shook her head.

"It cannot be done," she said. "I would only ruin myself and torture you by trying to do it. I am not the great love, dear Louis—for anybody. I cannot be. I am only"—she made a futile gesture—"a throat."

"Do not say that, my darling," I told her. "You are the greatest artist I have ever known—perhaps the greatest there

has ever been in your art. If I know this, and can say it at the price of my own happiness, you may believe that it is true."

She began to weep aloud, in slow, heavy sobs. I had seldom heard such sounds from her and they tore my heart. I longed to take her in my arms, yet felt restrained; there seemed an invisible hand upraised to hold us apart. I kept her fingers in mine and gripped them tight. With great difficulty, she said, "I am not grieving for myself—I cannot have safety and happiness—but for you. I can't bear to hurt you—Louis—Louis."

I leaned forward and with a motion brushed away the invisible barriers that kept us separated. I took her in my arms and clasped her to my breast. For the last time I kissed her rich, sensitive mouth, her great, heavily lidded eyes, her noble cheeks imposing in their pallor.

"Never grieve for me," I whispered. "You have hurt me, yes, but that is all past. You have given me the greatest riches woman ever bestowed on man. I love you, always. Remember, though we never meet again. Promise me only that—that you know what it is to be loved."

"I promise," she sobbed. "I know."

"Then God keep you always, my beloved."

She arose, her handkerchief before her face, and started to walk from the room. Suddenly she turned, strode to the windows, seized the cords of the curtains which were still drawn, and flung them wide. The morning sun poured in. Lifting her wet face she gave me one great, radiant smile. And then the door closed behind her.

Chapter Twelve

ELSIE DEHAVEN was buying ribbon at Harrods in London one afternoon in early June. She had been making small purchases—bootlaces, veils, hairpins—and now bought some baby ribbon such as ladies used to wear in their underclothes. She selected several pieces and gave the clerk her name and address, having to spell out the name to the girl. As she did so, she realized that a tall woman who had been standing beside her at the counter was for some reason not moving on. Miss deHaven finished spelling her name and turned, and the tall woman looked straight at her. She was Lena Geyer.

"My knees went weak," Miss deHaven wrote me, "and my eyes filled with tears. I could not speak. She pronounced my name in a deep, liquid voice while I grasped the counter for support. 'Elsie deHaven,' she said. 'Are you the E. deH. who sends me yellow roses?' I was too stupefied to do anything but nod. 'The slender young woman in the black gown that follows me all over Europe? And sits in a sixth-row stall?' She looked hard at me and I was surprised to see that her eyes were green.

"I found a fragment of voice presently and said, 'How did you know?' .

"She laughed. I wish I could tell you the quality of that laugh. It was like a glorious red Burgundy flowing into a goblet, rich and lustrous and warm. 'How did I know!' she exclaimed. 'Did you think nobody knew? My dear child, one does not have such an eccentricity without its being

noticed. My manager knows it. Monsieur deReszke knows it. My—my friends know it.'

"I was sick with mortification. I remember hanging my head like a child caught in mischief. I wanted to crawl into a hole and cry. But Lena Geyer put her arm through mine. 'Come along and have tea with me,' she said. We can have sandwiches and cake. I'm not singing tonight.' She chuckled and led me through the shop to the door where her carriage was waiting. My own carriage was there but I forgot it. We went to the Savoy where she was staying. All the way there I do not remember saying a word, and if she spoke I cannot remember what she said. Yet I have no recollection of awkward silence. I felt absolutely at peace, absolutely happy for the first time in my life. This was not like the happiness at the opera. This was something nobody could know but I, alone.

"As we entered her apartment she pulled out her hatpins and lifted off her hat. I found that I was intensely curious to see her hair. I was so accustomed to her wigs that I could hardly realize she had any hair. It was brown, rather darker than mine, and simply dressed in a low pompadour with a chignon at the back. Her figure as she took off her jacket was superb. She stood very straight, with her wide shoulders held back like a soldier, and walked with a free stride that no ordinary woman could have copied. She moved about the room with peculiar litheness, and my first physical impression of her was of tremendous vitality, trained and utilized to a point of driving force. She rang for tea and then came across to me holding out her hands. She asked me for my coat. I was so bewildered with joy that I let her take it as if I had been a child. Then she asked me to come and sit down with her by the window 'and talk,' she said. 'We must get acquainted.'

"I don't know what I meant to say but I blurted out my surprise that she spoke English, and without an accent.

"She threw back her head and laughed. 'Why that's not so odd,' she said. 'You are an American, are you not?'

"I nodded. 'So am I,' she said with a shrug.

" 'What?' I sat up as if I had been pinched. 'You an American? I thought you were an Austrian, a German, or something.'

" 'I am,' she said, 'but I lived in New York for years. I've never had a home, but New York came nearest to it.'

"I could hardly take this in. 'You mean you have been in New York?' I repeated. She assured me she had, that she had lived there and received most of her training there. I told her I thought she was Lilli Lehmann's pupil. 'I am,' she said, 'but I studied in New York a long time before that.'

"I was too surprised to speak. I watched her hands as she poured the tea, and was suddenly conscious that it was not the sort of thing she enjoyed doing. Her hands were large, unusually so, with square backs and long, rather thick fingers. The tips of them were blunt, heavily cushioned, and her nails were deep and filed quite short. The skin of her hands looked loose, as if they had never completely grown into it, though they were much too large for conventional standards. She wore no rings, and I never knew her to wear one, except her wedding ring after she was married. When some royalty or patron presented her with a ring, which happened rather often, she would have the stones reset into earrings or some ornament for her high collars. She wore high collars long after they went out of fashion.

"That afternoon we talked a good deal, though I can hardly tell you what we said, for we were groping toward an understanding that soon made small talk superfluous. She was very curious about me, and without my realizing it drew

most of my story out of me. She seemed to find it completely incredible that anyone should make a whole life out of following her around to hear her sing. She insisted she could not see what I got out of it. I tried to tell her it meant as much to me as parents, a husband, children, or anything most women attach themselves to. She only shook her head and stared. She asked me if I meant to keep it up. I told her so long as she would let me. She smiled and squeezed my hand. 'Better say so long as I please you,' she said.

"Just then her maid came in, a large frowning woman she called Dora, whose story I will tell you later. Dora said in a low voice, 'Monsieur is here.' Madame Geyer grimaced as she bit into a sandwich. 'Tell him I'm resting,' she said shortly. 'I'll dine with him at nine.' She ate with frank relish that I had never seen a woman show. She never nibbled anything, and she was not dainty in her appetite. You could not say she gobbled or did anything ungraceful, but she reminded me of a man when she ate. She grinned at me as she started on her third cake. '*Jour maigre* tomorrow,' she said. 'I'm singing.'

" 'I know,' I said.

"She grinned again. That expression was so free, so *gamine*, it was the last thing one could possibly expect of an opera singer. Everything of that sort about her enchanted and thrilled me. I knew she had a powerful personality, one could not hear her and not know that, but to discover this jolly, almost foolish human simplicity was tremendously exciting and surprising. Since I had never in my wildest dreams thought of meeting her I could not have anticipated her; but if I had, I suppose I would have thought of her as rather distant, rather queenly. She was queenly enough in bearing, and in her manner in public, but alone at home she was a big overgrown girl.

"Presently I realized that I had stayed much too long. As I was drawing on my gloves she smiled at me and said, 'Look here, wouldn't you like to come back after the opera tomorrow night and see me?'"

"I nodded, too pleased to speak. She strode over to her writing table and scribbled a note on a pad. She told me to give it to the guard at the stage door, and she would be expecting me. I held out my hand to say good-bye, but she did not take it. She put both her hands on my shoulders and stood a moment looking into my eyes. Then she bent down and kissed me on both cheeks. 'Thank you,' she said suddenly. I never knew what she meant by that. But I was too overwhelmed by my experience to wonder about it.

"The following night she was to sing a part I particularly loved, the Contessa in *Nozze di Figaro*. It was one of the parts that best displayed her wonderful musicianship, superficially simple in comparison with the great, complicated Wagnerian ones, but really much more exacting. She had tremendous respect for it, and I have known her at the height of her fame to practise the phrases of *Dove Sono* with all the earnest humility of a student. In character she was the ideal of the rôle, noble and restrained and deeply emotional. When she made her entrance, my heart leaped with a new sort of recognition. I felt in a way as if something of her belonged to me, and though she was too polished on the stage to do it, I had a feeling she might glance toward the place where she knew I sat. I had sent her that evening not only yellow roses, but a hamper of flowers, losing all sense of proportion in my new excitement about her.

"After the opera I went to her dressing room. When you realize how glamorous a prima donna's dressing room is even to a sophisticated person, you may imagine how I felt.

I was goggle-eyed with wonder. I knocked timidly and the door was opened a crack. Dora eyed me through it, then opened the door just wide enough for me to come in. She shut and locked it behind me. Along one wall there was a large dressing table with a huge mirror, entirely surrounded by lights. Madame Geyer sat before it on a stool. I had never seen anyone closely in make-up. (In those days we did not use rouge and lipstick as they do now.) Her face startled me. I could recognize it, and that was about all. Yesterday she had looked natural, and on the stage she had, but at this close range she was so distorted that for a moment I could hardly understand the change. She laughed, and held out one hand. 'Don't come too close till I take off this muck,' she said in a whisper, 'or you'll spoil that beautiful black dress.' She gave me a deliberate wink. I was vainly trying to tell her how beautifully she had sung, but no words seemed to come out.

"Dora was busy unhooking the tight bodice of the eighteenth-century gown. Madame Geyer stood up and shook herself. The whole thing slipped off around her feet, leaving her in a high-busted corset and a pair of lacy cambric drawers. I must have shown the question in my mind—how could she sing in such stays? She answered me by remarking that she was about ready to throw them all into the fire and start a vogue for natural lines on the stage. The sequel to that is that she did. Dora unlaced her, and removed the harness. As she did so, Madame Geyer groaned and stretched delightedly, then slipped a dressing gown over her shoulders and sat down again while Dora took off her white wig. Without the wig, and still with the make-up, she looked too grotesque for words. Her eyes were lined and beaded, with black and blue, her eyebrows caricatured in heavy arcs, more

awful because of a tight white bandage around her hair-line. She dipped her two hands into a big pot of white grease and slapped it all over her face and throat. 'Sit down,' she croaked at me. I was a little puzzled by the voice, but realized that it must be something singers did to rest their throats after singing. As she started to wipe off the thick, dirty mess, her own face emerged, white and fine-textured as I had seen it yesterday. Immediately I felt much better. Then she took the bandage off her forehead, and Dora brushed her hair vigorously.

"Just as she was twisting it up, there was a knock at the door and Dora admitted a tall man in an Inverness cloak, with an opera hat under his arm. He had a short, pointed black beard and a haughty manner. As I recognized him—the Duc de Chartres, whom I had met in Madame de Rancelles' drawing room—he caught sight of me sitting on the divan, and an expression of terrible anger flashed across his face. It was gone at once, and as he bent over to kiss Madame Geyer's hand he fixed me with a cold, narrowed, meaning glance of his eyes. I knew he meant me to gather that we were complete strangers, though I could not understand his motive. I knew of no reason why we should not have met.

"Madame Geyer introduced us and he bowed most coldly. I turned away and he spoke to her in French, telling her that the carriage was ready. At that she almost completely upset my poise by telling him that he must forgive her, she had invited me to go home to supper with her. She had of course done nothing of the sort and I was overcome by surprise. But since she had so thrown the situation into my hands, I could not make my excuses and leave, though that was what he would have had me do. I was learning fast, I realized, when

that was my first encounter with anything related to intrigue or the deeper currents of human motives. It was the duke who said good night. As he bent over her hand he asked her something I did not hear. She shook her head and brusquely, I thought, said '*Non, impossible. Bon soir.*' Even an innocent like myself could see that he was receiving a sharp dismissal.

"Madame Geyer washed her face vigorously with soap and water, brushed it over with powder, which she rubbed off with a piece of chamois, and quickly put on the clothes Dora handed her. She wore two or three layers of soft under-clothing, without corsets, and a long, loose dress of dark red wool. She put her feet, still in bedroom slippers, into a pair of velvet carriage boots, and put on a heavy black cloak lined in quilted silk that covered her completely, with a hood over her head. 'Come on,' she said to me. I had not really thought she meant I was to go home with her but when I saw that she did, I went along without hesitation. In the corridor she stopped suddenly with a look of consternation. She had no carriage, she had sent the duke away.

"I told her my carriage would be waiting, which I had completely forgotten, with poor Mademoiselle, my chaperone, inside. We sent the guard to the front door to have it sent round to the stage entrance. When Mademoiselle saw me emerging from the stage door with Lena Geyer (she knew it could be nobody else) she forgot her fright at my disappearance and gaped like an idiot. I presented her to Madame Geyer, who promptly made herself charming to the old spinster. We got out at the Savoy and sent Mademoiselle home. I told her to go to bed and tell the coachman to come back and wait for me at the Savoy. I saw she was shocked at such a departure but I did not care.

"There was a good fire burning in Madame Geyer's sitting room and a supper table set for two drawn up before it. She looked at it and laughed as she threw off her cloak. 'Poor Louis,' she said. 'I am ashamed of myself. You are going to eat his supper.'

"Much to my own surprise I found myself telling her I thought she should indeed be ashamed. I told her she had been cruel, and even rude. Then the enormity of my impudence came over me and I burst into tears. Madame Geyer strode across to me and put her arms around me. She was a head taller than I and I shrank against her. She was strong and warm. She stood there holding me for several minutes while I sobbed like a child. I was so unnerved by the emotions of the past twenty-four hours that I could not regain control of myself. For the first time in my life I was freely and utterly giving way to deep feeling. Lena Geyer pressed my head against her shoulder and murmured to me in German, tender broken phrases that one would use to a child. I felt as if I should die for love of her. I could not get my breath. Presently she drew away and put her hand under my chin and shook her head and whispered, 'You funny little girl.' Of course I know now what was puzzling her, but at that time such was my innocence that I had no idea of the ambiguity of my situation and my emotions. Although the world has since said many cruel things about this strange, almost passionate friendship between Madame Geyer and myself, I need hardly assure you that not one word of the essential accusation is true. Call me a freak if you like—the fact remains that my feeling for Lena Geyer was childlike in its simplicity, and yet more powerful than any other emotion in my life.

"As she held me to her I tried to say something, but could only gasp. She nodded slowly. She said, 'I know. There

is no explaining these things. You aren't a child any more. How old are you?"

"'Twenty-two.'

"'Ten years younger than I. Have you any friends?"

"I told her no, no friends anywhere.

"She said she had none either. She had everything else—sponsors, patrons, admirers, her two beloved teachers, a lover—but no friend. She smiled at me with tears in her eyes. 'Perhaps we need each other,' she said. And then, in the next breath, 'But I'm a devil, I warn you! Sometimes you'll hate me!'

"I said I could never hate her. I said—to this day I wonder how I summoned the courage—that I loved her. She put her arms around me again and kissed me. Then she took her handkerchief and dried my eyes with it and flicked the end of my nose. 'Stop crying,' she said. 'It makes your nose red.'

"Our supper came and she sniffed the dishes with delight. She said she really felt very guilty. Louis had ordered her favorite Mozart dishes and she had sent him away. I asked her what she meant by Mozart dishes and she told me that she always preferred certain foods after certain music—special ones for Mozart, Bellini, Verdi, Wagner, and the rest. This sounded too ridiculous to me. Not at all, she said, eating was as much a part of life as singing and she loved to eat. Different music put her in the mood for certain foods just as it made one gay or sad. I had never heard anything so curious. The Mozart supper consisted of a rich consommé with egg balls, fried chicken—*Wiener Backhänderl*, she called it—a delicious mixture of rice and green peas highly seasoned with herbs, asparagus, and a *Himmeltorte*. She said this was a special occasion and she sent for the sommelier and ordered a *Johannisberger Vogelsang*. I protested

that I hardly ever drank wine and that it made me dizzy. Then I would have to learn, she said, if I spent much time with her, because wine was the finest thing in the world and food was meaningless without it.

"I had never had such an evening. Actually I think that was the first meal I had ever eaten; all the others were just food I had consumed in the routine of existence. Her appetite would have made anyone feel good. She picked up her chicken and her asparagus in her fingers and even licked them once or twice, but though this looks terrible written down on paper, she did it with such charm and such childlike relish that it never suggested bad manners to me. My mother would probably have swooned at such a sight. She talked steadily, making an effort to whisper, but often forgetting and bursting into a loud laugh. There was an awkward moment when I asked her something and called her Madame Geyer. She looked at me with a puzzled frown and asked what I meant—I was supposed to call her Lena. She had a way of enveloping me with her enthusiasm and warmth; it was like walking into a warm, beautiful room after being out in a cold rain for a long time.

"When I remembered suddenly that I had a carriage waiting I looked at my watch and it was nearly two o'clock. I had never been up so late in my life. I jumped up, frightened. She looked up at me lazily. 'What difference does it make?' she asked. 'Who is going to punish Cinderella for staying out late?'

" 'Why—nobody!' I said with surprise.

" 'Exactly,' she nodded. 'You must not be such a timid little mouse. Do as you please. Be careless.'

"This advice coming from her was more startling than literal, since she was the least careless person in the world. But it was typical of the effect she had on me—relaxing my

superficial repressions. I had been trained to regard every detail of existence as an obligation to a rigid code; she did everything to free me from this. As I was leaving she asked when I could come and see her again, knowing well that I was too shy to suggest it. I told her whenever she wished. She said she would send me word. Tomorrow she would have to devote the whole day to Louis. For a moment I was tempted to be rash and give her some more unsolicited advice. But without any background of experience, advice of that kind coming from me would seem thoroughly ridiculous, so I restrained myself; though it was not long before I discovered that with or without experience, the advice I felt impelled to give her was usually right. It was one of the queer bonds that held us together. There were often times when I could not make a decision for myself but could trust myself to make them for her.

"Within two weeks after our first evening together I was seeing Lena Geyer every day. She lived a life of orderly routine and I adapted mine to hers. She would send me a message early in the morning asking if I wished to go walking with her, and at ten I would meet her at the door of the Savoy. We would start out on one of what we called her treks. Any walk shorter than a mile was useless to her. Two miles was a decent walk, and what she liked better was about four. I was not used to such exercise and at first I would be so exhausted that I fell asleep the moment I sat down. One night when we had walked for three hours in the morning I fell asleep at the opera, though to be sure it was during Wotan's and Fricka's discourse in *Die Walküre*; I was wide awake when Lena was on the stage. Her Sieglinde was like her Elisabeth, the utmost and ultimate expression of the perfect feminine. Sieglinde is an elusive and exceedingly difficult rôle, its chief demand upon the singer being not

so much vocal as human. If she is a trivial and superficial person she fails to project the character no matter how fine her voice. There have been only a few memorable Sieglindes since Wagner composed the opera, though every capable dramatic soprano has sung it. Olive Fremstad was often called the greatest, but in her time Lena Geyer was the only Sieglinde. She used to move through the part building up an atmosphere of loneliness and terror and tragedy, against which the passion of her love for Siegmund was like fire. When she came on in the second act, stumbling and clinging to Siegmund, her whole story was told in the lines of her body and the way her voice came from deep down in it rather than from her throat. Her impersonation was almost unbearably revealing of a woman's heart. The only Sieglinde I have heard to compare with it is that of Lotte Lehmann, who sings it today—she has what Lena had, the resources of a noble character and intense emotion.

"Lena loved the part and felt it so deeply that it was one characterization from which she did not rebound immediately. She would be pensive and subdued for an hour or two afterward. There was no jolly smile for anyone who called at her dressing room then. She hardly noticed who came. At first I did not go to her dressing room unless she asked me to, and sometimes she said nothing about it and I did not go back. She would give me a sharp sidelong look the next morning and ask me why I had not come. My real reason for hesitation had to do with the duke, but I did not presume to tell her that.

"I was distinctly uneasy about him and about her treatment of him—there was so much I had been brought up deliberately not to understand! But I soon gathered most of the hidden details from Lena's manner. It was very difficult for her to hide anything from me, and in this case she did

not try. I always found plenty to criticise in Lena, and could never pretend that I thought her perfect. I was rather more shocked by her method of terminating this liaison than by the fact that the liaison had existed, for it seemed to me that she was awkward and cruel about it. He was a gentleman, a man like my own father and brother, but with far more sensibility and artistic taste than they had had. Yet she was treating him as if he had been a boor.

"Any understanding of Lena's attitude toward men must lie in a knowledge of her early life, where some things happened that she never told even me about. Not until she was dying and the doctors made some astonishing revelations to Henry and me did I know her story completely. Some of it I could not be induced to touch on. I do know that the things that happened in her early and bitter obscurity were such as to make her suspicious and harsh toward most men. Louis de Chartres was bowled over by her and he swept away her bristling defenses with glowing promises of what love could be. Indeed, I think that, in accepting his advances, curiosity was her most important motive. You realize that she had behind her over twenty years of hardship, ugliness, and deprivation—her life as a student had been austere to the last degree, and the explanation of her love of eating lies in the dry black bread and cups of unsweetened tea that she had lived on. The wonder is that she did not succumb utterly to the life of luxury and pleasure that Louis de Chartres held out to her. He offered her beauty, amusement, and a chance to enjoy the things that other people want. She had a competitive streak, and when she started at the Paris Opéra in 1902 she soon saw that most opera singers had wealthy or titled lovers, and that those who did not were all longing to capture the Duc de Chartres. She never thought of him as a means of furthering her career or as an introduction to desir-

able contacts. She was intrigued by his good looks, his money, and the fact that if she were his mistress she would be the envy of Europe. Such, I think, were her motives.

"Yet on the whole she was honest with the duke. He knew how she felt. She had accepted him the year before I was first in Paris with Madame de Rancelles, and for nearly five years thereafter she said she found everything in the connection that he had promised her; and she really loved him. But the time finally came when her ambition reasserted itself and made her realize that a love affair was a tremendous hindrance; and instead of telling him frankly that she wanted to part, she made the decision in her own mind and said nothing to him. I criticise her for this. I think it was weak and unkind. Once she realized that she was going to send him away, she began to feel differently toward him, and her taste for the pleasures he provided faded. His conversation bored her. She became cold and short with him, and this maddened him, for he was proud and exceedingly jealous. A man of his type would inevitably assume that any termination of a liaison ought to come from him.

"About a month after I first knew Lena, we went out walking one sunny morning. The Covent Garden season was just closing and she was making her summer plans. She was striding along in a full skirt, while I trotted beside her. She took one step to my two; it was a long time before I learned how to walk comfortably with her. She was in a silly mood that day, and had invented a game of counting all the women we passed that had buck teeth. Most Englishwomen being unfortunately so afflicted, she was very busy. But I was preoccupied. I had had supper with her the evening before and she had been unkind to Louis again, sending him word at the last minute that he could not join her. I stopped her as she counted the forty-seventh set of buck

teeth and asked her frankly if she had thought to use me, that very first evening, as a means of getting rid of Louis.

"She dropped her game and turned to me with a stare. For a moment I thought she was going to evade me and tell a lie—which she was quite capable of doing—but she did not. She said, 'I'm afraid so, Elsie.' There was a long silence. Then she said, 'Can you forgive me?'"

"Of course I could forgive her anything. My feelings had not been hurt anyway. If she had used me, just that once, and never seen me again, my life would have been richer for one hour close to her. But I was heartsick on Louis's account. In a way he and I were on one side of a fence and Lena was on the other. She was our opposite—the simple explanation of why we both loved her so much. I was ashamed for her that she could do anything so cheap, yet I had to tell myself that she was really a peasant, with no background, no social training, not so much knowledge of that part of the world as even an innocent like me. I at least had a tradition to go by. She had nothing.

"I wonder now as I look back on it how I could so often turn the relationship between us from Lena as the leader and myself as the worshipping satellite to myself as preceptor and Lena as an humble child listening to me. I did this now. I told her she was doing a disgraceful thing, much more disgraceful than the questionable morality of having been Louis's mistress in the first place. I told her she owed him nothing, nor he her, except respect and courtesy, neither of which things she was showing. And in acting as she was, she was doing herself great harm. I accused her of cowardice, which was all that had kept her from being fair with Louis. I told her that though I would always love her; no matter what she did, she would lose my esteem unless she faced this question squarely and acted honorably about it. It

may seem presumptuous for me to have told her she would lose anything in my eyes, but by that time I realized that she was growing dependent on me, and she knew it too. I had lost almost all of my awe of her as a person, even though on the stage she always overwhelmed me with her genius and power. When she was singing she was not my Lena, she was the unapproachable Madame Geyer.

"There was nothing unapproachable about her now. She put her hand on my arm and told me she knew I was right. She was being cowardly. She had wanted for months to tell Louis it was all over, but what she felt worst about was the way she had abused my devotion. 'It was a filthy thing to do,' she said. 'I am disgusted with myself. I thought at the time, what harm if I take the little thing home with me—it will thrill her and I'll let her down easily afterward. You see—I didn't know you—not until you spoke up there in my sitting room.'

" 'You know me now,' I said. 'There isn't much to know.'

" 'There's enough so that I can't escape you,' Lena said. 'You're an invisible necessity.'

"She promised me that she would speak to Louis immediately, and I told her I would not come to see her again until it was all settled. I did not want her to lean on me and prolong her state of indecision.

"The next night I received a message from her asking me to come early the following morning. When Dora let me in, Lena was standing in the middle of the sitting room in a striped taffeta petticoat and a ruffled pink combing jacket, singing her scales in fullest voice and winding up each one with an arpeggio that made my skin tingle. In a small room her voice sometimes sounded unbearably big. This morning it was like an army crowded into a box-car. She was pointing and motioning to Dora and two hotel maids who were

all rushing round packing things into a row of trunks standing in the hallway. Tissue paper was waist deep all over the room. There was a pile of boxes from the opera house full of costumes, and Lena's best wig, the golden one she wore for Elisabeth and Elsa, was hanging from the chandelier, freshly braided. Dora was scowling as usual, the only person in the room with any notion of what she was doing; but Lena was so bursting with energy that she had to pretend to supervise, though she knew no more about packing than I did about singing.

"What is this?" I asked.

"Lena stopped in the middle of a shake and nearly knocked me down with a bear hug. '*Himmlisch!*' she cried. '*Frei! O wunderschöner Freiheitstag!*'

"I never knew what language she might speak when she was excited. If she were angry it was apt to be Italian. If mischievous, French. If ecstatic, German. Once in a while she would explode into a hideous gibberish nobody could understand. That was Czech, her native tongue. Today she was a child. She picked up her petticoat in one hand and me in the other and whirled around the room like a dervish, shouting and singing all in one breath. I caught hold of a chair as we whirled by it and sat down. 'Are you crazy?' I asked her.

"'*Gewiss!*' she shouted. '*Ganz verrückt! Hoch! Heil! Hooray!*'

"I asked her why the sudden packing. 'Because we're going,' she exulted. 'Leaving this afternoon. Are you ready?'

"'Am I ready?' I thought she had really lost her wits. I told her to sit down and try to make sense. She plunked down on the floor beside me and put her hands on my knees. 'You and I,' she said like somebody talking to an infant, 'and

Dora and Nellie and Mademoiselle and anybody else we can't get rid of are going to Salzburg this afternoon!"

"Of course I told her it was impossible. And of course I knew at once that it was exactly what I would do. I tried to tell her there was no hurry, that she was silly to rush us all that way. She would not listen. '*Nein*,' she said, shaking her head like a mechanical toy, '*nein, Heute fahren wir alle weg*!'"

"I sent a messenger rushing to my hotel with a note to Mademoiselle and my maid Nellie. I knew they would take it more calmly and actually get packed if I did not come back. It fell to me to get the tickets for the party—Lena had completely overlooked that, having had Louis to do such things for her before. By the time everything was ready and I had made two flying trips between her hotel and mine, we converged on Victoria Station in two phalanxes each with a wagonload of luggage. Dora was surly and matter-of-fact as usual; none of this was news to her. Nellie was so flustered that she had put her skirt on inside out—fortunately it was black and did not show much. And Mademoiselle was almost dead. She arrived at the train holding a fan and a smelling-bottle and calling *le bon Dieu* to witness that she was killing herself for her darling dead Madame's child. Crossing on the boat to Holland, Lena and I were standing together by the rail, alone. She had quieted down. All the nonsense had been in her rooms. In public she was always very sedate. Actually she was beginning to feel apprehensive; she was an abominable sailor. So her pallor and her unearthly look were perhaps not caused by the emotions that they might have been. Presently I asked her if Louis had understood. 'He did understand,' she answered, 'and you were right. I was a beast, vulgar and cruel.'"

Chapter Thirteen

THE DUC DE CHARTRES was inclined to attach such ominous significance to Elsie deHaven that it is now time to tell the truth about her, and to realize that she was far more pathetic than sinister. She was shy, homely, inarticulate, the spinster daughter of a wealthy American family, who was left quite alone in the world by the death of her parents. Her devotion to Lena Geyer is proverbial wherever Geyer is remembered, and it was only in the earliest years of her attachment that anyone so much as questioned the nature of it. It soon became clear to all who knew her that Elsie—or as she was always called, Elsa—deHaven wanted and expected nothing more of life than the privilege of living with Lena Geyer and of acting as companion, secretary, housekeeper, amanuensis, and confidante. It was, after all, not a barren life. Miss deHaven could not help growing in personality and broadening in point of view, until when I knew her she was a real character, with a particularly dry kind of wit, and a merciless eye for a fake of any sort. As she grew older she seemed to shrink in size—not that she had ever been very large—and she reminded me of a small gray and black bird, perched on the back of Lena Geyer's chair, with its head cocked and its bright beady eye missing nothing.

Miss deHaven was prevailed on by Madame Geyer herself to help me with material for this book. At first she would have nothing to do with me. I sensed that to her I was just a young upstart, with perhaps the additional stigma of Semitic intelligence of a quicker type than she thought correct or tra-

ditional for a publisher. A publisher, in her mind, should be sedate, grave, and redolent of old American tradition, like Richard Watson Gilder, who had been her father's close friend, and of whom she often spoke to me in rather reproachful tones. She was genuinely shocked when Madame Geyer and I both brought pressure on her to reveal everything of her own life that had a bearing on Lena Geyer, and everything in Lena Geyer's life, of which she knew more than anyone in the world. But when she capitulated she did so completely, and I feel no greater debt of gratitude to anyone, in connection with this work, than I do to her. Since Madame Geyer's death Miss deHaven has spent most of her time on the French Riviera in a little house they had sometimes lived in together, and has written me long letters in answer to my unabashed questions. Some of these letters are so intimate and so colorful, especially when you bear in mind the timid, reticent woman who wrote them, that I am quoting them in their entirety.

The explanation of Miss deHaven's friendship with the Comtesse de Rancelles, and of how she first heard Lena Geyer sing, is contained in the first letter she wrote me after she sailed for Europe last year. I had asked her to include enough of her own background to fix herself as an identity in the story.

"If you have read Mrs. Wharton's novels of the seventies and eighties in New York," she wrote me, "you will understand the type of family and position I was born into. My father was Gerald Dyckman deHaven, a descendant of two old New York strains, the Dutch and the Huguenots, who settled around New Rochelle. My mother was Elsie Elizabeth Archibald, whose ancestors were in New York before the Revolution. My parents lived in a brownstone house in East Thirty-sixth Street, which I still own, and they spent

half of the year at our country estate near Tarrytown, where my nephew, my brother's only son, lives now. I was born in New York in 1885, and brought up in the most rigid conventional pattern. I went to the young ladies' school where my mother had been educated, and it was planned for me to make my *début* the winter I was eighteen. I finished at Miss Vandevanter's School when I was seventeen, and my mother had intended to take me abroad for part of the intervening year.

"I dreaded the thought of 'coming out' and of all the sequels to it. I was much too young to know why I did not like them, or to think of any alternative. I was excessively shy, and we were an undemonstrative family. My father was so reserved that I think of him to this day with awe and respect, never with ordinary affection; he was too distant to command it. My mother was submissive with him and gentle with my brother and me, though she would have shown a strong will if either of us had ever opposed her. We were expected to obey unquestioningly. Indeed I never thought of doing anything else, but when I was alone I used to give way to fits of real terror at the prospect of the life ahead of me. I was not pretty and was well aware that my plain looks were causing my mother great worry. Once I overheard her say to her sister that she did not see how Elsie could ever hope to fix a young man's attentions, or find a husband. I dare-say I should have felt badly, but I remember a definite sense of relief at what I had heard. If my own mother did not think me attractive enough to win a husband, I need not worry that it was positively expected of me.

"My mother was planning to take me to Europe in the spring of 1903, and to stay there, making what used to be called the grand tour, until the late fall, when I should be brought home and presented. But in the early winter of that

year my father fell ill, and remained an invalid for the rest of his life. My mother did not feel that she could leave him, yet she was determined that I should have my finishing abroad. She arranged with the Comtesse de Rancelles, a girlhood friend of hers, to take me into her home in Paris and to chaperone me and supervise the finishing of my education. My governess took me across on the ship, and turned me over to Madame de Rancelles. The old countess was a great lady and a great woman of the world, thoroughly in accord with all my mother's ideas, yet sophisticated in the Continental tradition of older women as my mother could never have been. She understood my mother's problem so thoroughly that, as I found out years later, she offered to find me a good *parti* in Paris, regardless of my plainness, because I was a well-born heiress. Such a sensible arrangement, she assured my mother, could only be made in a civilized country, never in the States.

"At the same time, Madame de Rancelles had knowledge of the mind and heart far beyond anything I had known before. I think she believed that whether I married or not, I would never develop a taste for superficial pleasures or society or flirtation. In New York, young girls were never exposed to anything, no matter how proper, in the world of art, until after their débuts and marriages. Then they made sedate expeditions to galleries to see paintings, and to the opera for one purpose only—to be seen. The woman or man in my world who thought of the opera as anything but a social display case, with arias sung by famous artists as accompaniment, was a rarity. I had never sat in my family's box at the Metropolitan because that was not done until after one's début; therefore I had never heard an opera. Madame de Rancelles' ideas were otherwise. *Jeune fille* though I was, she saw to it that I was introduced to art and music. She said

this must be done so that I could make intelligent conversation when I began going to dinners. I think now that she foresaw the sort of person I have become, and what music has meant to me. Of course I had been taught to play the piano, in a manner I blush to think about. Madame dismissed that with a wave of her hand. 'Play if you wish,' she used to say, 'play your pretty ballads, but please, *ma chère*, do not play them where anyone will hear you!'

"I arrived in Paris late in April, just when the spring season was beginning. Madame de Rancelles established me in her house in a position I had never occupied before; the daughter of the house, the sheltered *jeune fille*, liable to be sent out of the room if the conversation took certain turns, but at the same time included in far more than had been the case at home. She had a beautiful old *hôtel* off the Boulevard Saint-Germain, and she received the most staid Parisian society on her afternoons. In view of the world as I have seen it since, I realize that she was really what the fast world calls 'stuffy Saint-Germain,' but to me she seemed to lead a life of wonderful freedom. She went to the opera every ten days or two weeks. Strangely enough, although Madame took extreme care what conversation I heard, what books I read, and what paintings I saw, she made few reservations about the opera. For one thing the technique of acting in those days, as practised by most singers, was so guarded as to remove much of the significance from the most lurid libretto.

"A few weeks after I arrived in Paris Madame told me at *dejeuner* one day that that evening we were going to the opera, and that it was to be more than usually interesting. A singer from Vienna, who had made her Paris *début* the previous year, had returned for her season and was to sing Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* tonight. I was already so thrilled

by my three or four tastes of opera that I attached no special significance to any one singer ; I had heard the deReszkes, Melba, Sembrich, and Nordica, but all had enchanted me equally. I knew they were supposed to be very great, but I was still too dazzled by their glamour to understand singers as personalities. And I had never heard a Wagner opera. I think up to that time I had heard *Lucia*, *Le Prophète*, *Faust*, and *Don Giovanni*.

"We arrived late at *Tannhäuser*, perhaps because it was the first opera to which she took me in which Madame thought there was anything to fear on my account. Therefore the Venusberg scene, which she wished to avoid, was over when we took our seats in her box. Jean deReszke was singing. I can see myself still, erect and uncomfortable in my stays which Madame's maid had laced so tightly, with a high round neck and puff sleeves, as became my age, in contrast to Madame's décolleté gown. I wore my hair, which was straight and a colorless shade of brown, marcelled in a pompadour off my forehead, and of course long gloves, up to the sleeves of my dress, with fingers so tight I could hardly move my hands. Those clothes were intensely uncomfortable, yet we wore them without thinking to object. They had a great deal to do with the stiffness of our manners, and I was terribly shy and awkward besides.

"The first act ended, with the marvellous sextette and deReszke's voice soaring above it. I had never heard such music, and sat stunned all through the first intermission, while Madame conversed with her friends. A deReszke night was always a great occasion, but the gentlemen who came to pay their respects to Madame were also full of talk about the new soprano who would appear in the next act. She was young, Lilli Lehmann's most brilliant pupil, and *une fille*. . . ! I can still remember the expression on the old

Marquis de Fontnouvelle's face as he rolled his eyes toward the chandelier. I also caught a whisper about 'Chartres' as de Fontnouvelle bent over Madame's shoulder, but had no idea what he meant, and knew well that I was not supposed to have heard in any case.

"Our visitors retired and the lights went down. The orchestra began the opening bars of the second act and the curtains parted on the great Wartburg Hall. In the rear centre of the bare stage was a great door, and through this suddenly swept a tall, radiant figure in a flowing white satin robe, with a pearl halo above her long golden hair. Her arms were raised in a joyful gesture, and her face glowed with a rapturous smile. This was the first real emotion I had seen on an opera singer's face, and before I could realize my own joy, she had let out a sweep of glorious sound that I shall never forget. I am sure that such radiance, such glory, has never poured from a human throat. At first I was too thrilled to breathe; I remember how the pulse in my throat choked me. And when she was halfway through the greeting, and I had regained my balance from the shock, I sat letting it rush through me like electricity, completely unconscious of ever having lived before. When you realize that emotion, as we use the word, was actually unknown to me until that time, that the strongest feeling I had ever had was pleasure in a new pet, or fright from shyness, you may be able to understand what that experience did to me. It was exactly like the unlocking of a prison door. The voice poured into me, and from that moment it became the one thing I cared to live for. The whole identity that my parents had so carefully created melted in the force of the singing I heard that night. All the barriers built up by convention and habit seemed to shrivel, and I felt in those few moments a free and purposeful individual. I did not even know I was repressed, or

inarticulate, yet once I felt freed, I knew that I had never lived before.

"After the duet with deReszke there was a demonstration. I was oblivious of that. I merely sat there with my eyes riveted on the singer, thrilled by the freedom of her movements and the sureness of her technique, but there again, I did not know what thrilled me. I was too childish and simple. I had never seen anything like it before, and I have not seen its equal since. During the second intermission I sat in my corner and stared at one spot on the closed curtain, through which in my imagination the singer was still visible. Madame paid no attention to me; the box was buzzing with excited comment about the extraordinary performance. In the third act, when Elisabeth knelt at the foot of the cross and sang the Prayer, I was carried in the other direction from my first excitement and was, for the first time in my life, moved to tears. One could not cry in public in those days; the kid gloves and tiny lace handkerchiefs would have made it impossible even without the uses of convention. I was in agony, trying to dry my tears and stifle my snuffles without ruining my gloves. This seems ridiculous now, yet it was all part of the tremendous experience I had that night. When Elisabeth, drooping and heartbroken, a profound and pitiful contrast to the joyful maiden of the second act, dragged herself sadly off the stage, I sat back and closed my eyes. I did not want to see or hear anything more; I had already received more than I could hold. Not until we were in the carriage on the way home did I look at my program and really learn the name of the singer. It was Lena Geyer, and it immediately became a rhythm in my head that went on, over and over, all that night, and for many nights to come. The sound of her voice stayed with me too, and became a physical sensation, almost like a taste, that one can recall at will. I have

heard Lena Geyer so many times now that the memories of many individual performances are blurred, but her Elisabeth remains to me the height of human inspiration. She truly lived every part, but to me nothing compared in power and force with that one, ranging through every emotion from purest joy to heartbreak.

"This is the account of how I first saw and heard Lena Geyer. It was a long time before I met her, and many things happened meanwhile."

One taste of happiness and freedom had made the routine of her old life at home intolerable to Elsie deHaven. Her father's death forced her return to New York after she had been with the Comtesse de Rancelles for six months. She reached home to find her mother and brother (a narrow-minded young man) thoroughly enjoying their mourning in the midst of shrouded furniture, black clothes, and total incarceration from the world. Elsie's only ray of consolation was that she was now not expected to make a formal *début* into society. Instead, she quietly made plans to go to the opera as much as possible that winter. Even though this was years before Geyer came to the Metropolitan, she could fill the blank pages of her life with the music she had learned to adore.

But this was not Paris, and Elsie's plans to indulge her new and mature emotions were smashed the very first day she tried to put them into effect. She had asked her old governess to accompany her, and the two of them were descending the stairs to the front hall, when Mrs. deHaven accosted them and inquired where they were going. When Elsie said she was going to the opera, a scene ensued. How could she be so thoughtless of her father's memory! She was in mourning. An appearance at the opera was out of the ques-

tion for at least a year. She dragged herself upstairs again and flung herself on her bed and wept.

Mrs. deHaven had no inkling of the spiritual and emotional experience Elsie had had in Paris, and would have been inexpressibly shocked had she been told about it. At any word or gesture from Elsie that suggested the slightest independence of thought or feeling, her mother put on a demonstration of outrage that repelled and sickened the girl. There was nobody to understand her. She spent days at a time pining and brooding over her brief happiness in Paris. The name and memory and voice of Lena Geyer symbolized for her everything free and fair and beautiful in life. She would sit for hours in her room, slowly turning over the programs of the operas she had heard in Paris, reliving every instant of the music and every throb of feeling she had derived from the sight and sound of Lena Geyer. Without the peculiar stimulus of her isolation and friendlessness she might never have reached the state of intensity that she did. But there was literally no other outlet in her whole existence for her dreams and yearnings and ideals.

"It is rather shocking to reflect," she wrote me, "that my mother's sudden death of pneumonia in the winter of 1905 set me free beyond my wildest dreams. When the first bewilderment was past, and the family affairs came up for settlement, it appeared that my brother and I were the sole heirs to a very large fortune. My mother had died intestate, and my father had left most of his property to her for her lifetime, to be divided between Dyckman and me at her death. The New York house was left to me, and the Tarrytown estate to Dyckman. The money was equally divided. I was twenty-one when this happened, but Dyckman seemed to take it for granted that he was my guardian and that he would arrange my life, provide a chaperone, and see to it

that I continued in the way our parents had intended I should go. On an evening that I shall never forget, because it was the first time in my life that I asserted myself, I told him I had no idea of following any such plan.

"He was at first incredulous and deprecating, and later when he saw that I was in earnest, very angry. He could not understand that there might be something I wanted to do. When he realized that there was something, and that I had the means with which to do it, he was furious. He was exactly like my father in his fixed idea that women had no function, right, or identity in life except through the authority of men. He expected me to go on living as we had been, keeping house for him, and eventually either marrying or retiring into obscure spinsterhood when he should marry and his wife should take my place. I told him quietly and firmly that I was determined to have my way and to do what I wanted to. He asked me what I wanted to do, and I told him I was going to travel. 'Where?' he asked me. 'Anywhere that I have reason to go,' I said. But I did not tell him my reason.

"He raised all the conventional objections relating to women alone. I assured him I would take Nellie, my maid, but that was not satisfactory. I was still sufficiently under the habit of obedience to agree when he said I could not travel without a better chaperone than a maid. All I knew was that he could not prevent the bank from paying me my income, and that I could spend it as I pleased. After a certain point in the argument, like most stubborn people, Dyckman lost interest and capitulated all at once. 'I don't care what you do,' he said, 'but I wish you would have enough respect for our parents' memory not to disgrace them by wandering around the world all alone.'

"I agreed not to disgrace him or our parents in this way,

and finally we decided that Mademoiselle Desvignes, my old governess, would make a suitable companion and chaperone. She was a well-bred French bourgeoisie of extreme respectability, fifty-five years old, and entirely devoted to me. She had never left us because my father had had the fine old-fashioned idea that one never dismissed and forgot a worthy retainer. I asked her if she would care to live with me, spending most of her time travelling. Like all French people she had a sound respect for money, and I gave her to understand that I was now in possession of enough money to do exactly as I pleased, and that her only function would be to placate the conventions by being my 'chaperone.' She was of course enchanted, particularly when I told her that our first stop would be Paris.

"So in April, 1905, two years after my first trip abroad under such different circumstances, Mademoiselle and I, accompanied by Nellie, sailed for Europe. Dyckman saw us off on the boat, and in parting asked me when would I be back. 'I have no idea,' I said, which caused him to leave in a bad temper. I had no idea but one: I was going straight to wherever Lena Geyer was singing, and I proposed to be wherever she was singing, for how long I did not know.

"We reached Paris toward the end of April, and I soon found myself grateful to my brother for insisting that I take Mademoiselle. I had not stopped to think how ignorant I was of everything in the world outside the narrow sphere I had always known. I left all travel arrangements, finances, and dealings with clerks and hotel keepers to Mademoiselle, who was in her element among them. We always had beautiful rooms and the best of everything, for which Mademoiselle bargained as shrewdly as if I had needed to save the extra francs and centimes. I learned a good deal from watching her, little realizing that one day I would be doing the

same thing for Lena Geyer. At this time I was too intent on the present ever to think of the future.

"While Mademoiselle settled us in a suite at the hotel, I pored over the opera schedules I had sent for before even taking off my hat. Madame Geyer was to sing the following night in *Lohengrin*, and twice weekly until the middle of May, when I knew she was booked for Covent Garden. I told Mademoiselle to enjoy her Paris as fully as she could because we would be leaving for London in three weeks, at which she drew a disgusted face. I had worried ever since leaving New York about what to do with her while I went to the opera. I did not want her with me. I wanted to be alone, not only because it suited my mood, but because I wanted to be free of people who thought of opera as a spectacle or a fashionable entertainment. Mademoiselle, I knew, would think of it in no other way. So I was enormously relieved when she shook her head at the sight of my sheaf of handbills and murmured '*Quel horreur!*'

"I asked her if she disliked opera. She said she did, very much, and I told her she need never go. She looked worried and asked me what was to become of me. I told her I wished to go alone. She protested with typical gestures of consternation and said it was *incroyable*, no lady could go to the opera alone. We discussed the problem for a long time. Even today it would be a problem; Paris is no place for a woman to go anywhere alone, and certainly not to the opera. I think I would never have had the courage to begin such a habit if I had not felt fortified by my own plainness. It was unthinkable that anyone would accost or annoy a young woman who looked like me. Another reason why I wanted to go alone was to get away from the glittering boxes and the elaborate toilettes one wore in them. I went to see the Comtesse de Rancelles and told her how I felt. I had rightly

guessed that a woman of such intelligence and individuality would be interested and sympathetic toward someone as odd as I. I was no longer her responsibility; I was independent and if I wanted to be unconventional she was willing to help me do as I pleased without making myself conspicuous.

"She took me to Premet's where we ordered two black dresses, cut exactly alike and extremely severe, with high necks and long sleeves. One was made of velvet, the other of a sheer silk, and they were so elegantly cut and finished that they were evening dresses in everything except décolletage. For the first time I felt comfortable. In such clothes I could sit by myself in a stall and be happy in my own way. Mademoiselle would accompany me to the Opéra in a carriage, escort me to the door, and leave me there. She would go off to spend the evening sewing and gossiping with her cousins, and would be waiting for me at the side door when the opera was over.

"Thus I began to live according to my ideas. At *Lohengrin* I was so wrought up with the long starvation I had endured, and the suspense, that I could hardly breathe. I barely heard the dissertation between the King and Telramund. When the Herald stepped forward and summoned Elsa my heart began to pound wildly. At last she appeared, following the interminable train of maidens, and I stared at Lena Geyer as if I could never see enough of her face. I have never been so glad to see anything. I could not be gladder to see her today, if she walked into this garden. Her expression was gentle and demure, something that would almost be a smirk on some faces, but she made it so right for the character that it radiated sincerity.

"Then she began to sing, and since there are no words to describe the joy that poured into my soul, I shall not look for them. The sensation I had was like fresh water pouring into

the throat of someone nearly dead of thirst. I was quite unnerved. But I was all alone in the dark seat, without white kid gloves, and armed with a good everyday handkerchief. I could let the tears flow. I had not heard Geyer's Elsa before, and once more I was struck with the astonishing versatility of her voice. I think she could do anything with it. Here she gave it a clear, pure quality so different from that of her Carmen or her Aïda as to lead you to suppose that it was an entirely different woman. Yet the same physical thrill was there, that thing that gripped me and made something inside me leap into my ears and throat. I would hesitate to describe some of the effects of her voice upon me, if I did not know that it affected most people in similar ways, you among them, I am sure.

"She did the so-called Balcony Scene with a delicacy and a spirituality that were new revelations of her power. This side of her I had never seen. After I knew her well I used to try to identify the qualities of her operatic parts with her own character. It was difficult. She was less like Elsa than like any other part she played, but she put such intelligence into her portrayal that she could play the 'stupid goose' without a suggestion of insipidity or simpering. 'Stupid goose' was her own epithet for Elsa, and she never understood why people loved her in the part. 'Ah yes, a wonderful score,' she used to say, 'they love all the tunes, and the deadly wedding march. But that stupid goose, so full of dreams!'

"I suppose I would have been shocked if I had realized what was going on in the head of that enraptured creature on the stage. I let myself be carried away, frankly enjoying the sentimentality. Lohengrin was one of Jean de Reszke's greatest parts, and he did not waste an ounce of its meaning—if it could be said to have any meaning, Lena Geyer once remarked. But he made an unforgettable picture, with his

mailed hand raised in warning, as he sang the ominous motif, *'Nie sollst Du mich befragen.'*

"Geyer was to sing Donna Anna three days later, and during the day I passed a florist's shop while walking on the Rue Saint-Honoré. For some reason it had never occurred to me to send her flowers, probably because I had never sent them to anyone. There was a mass of yellow roses in the window, so arresting that I stopped to look at them. I thought of her and decided to send them. When the florist asked for my card, I started to tell him not to enclose a card. Then I had one of my most daring thoughts so far. If the hints I had overheard about the Duc de Chartres were true, she would undoubtedly take it for granted that any flowers without a card came from him. And I did not want her to think he had sent my roses. So I took a plain white card and wrote on it 'E. deH.' I was trembling at my own audacity, but I told the man as coolly as I could to send them to Madame Geyer at the Opéra that evening. When I reached the hotel I was aghast at what I had done.

"There is no use giving you the lengthy details of my life for the next two years. It was always the same. Wherever Lena Geyer was engaged to sing, Mademoiselle and I, with Nellie, were established in a comfortable hotel. Mademoiselle had long ago outgrown her disapproval of my eccentricity. She loved to travel and the only times she grumbled were when we were in London. Like many French people she loathed it. When I told her, in February 1907, that we were going to St. Petersburg, she did not turn a hair. But I knew she was terrified. She thought of Russia as a wilderness full of ferocious Cossacks slashing down defenseless people in the streets. She was so sporting about it that I took her out the first day we were there and bought her a beautiful fur coat.

"After Russia came Poland, Germany, and Scandinavia. When Lena Geyer broke with the Vienna Hofoper and started out on her big tour of Europe that year, I was greatly excited by the prospect of all the extra travelling. Yet everywhere my life was the same. I have always been a creature of order and routine and I settled down comfortably in each new city, completely contented so long as I had my Geyer to listen to. On her first appearance everywhere I sent her a huge box of yellow roses, and smaller bouquets of violets or camellias for every performance. When we reached London that spring, the flowers were particularly beautiful and I took special pleasure in selecting them. Not until long after it had actually happened could I realize that at last I knew my idol and dream, and that henceforward my life was going to be very different. Yet in all the years I lived with her, I never took her so much for granted that I failed to send flowers to her dressing room for every performance."

Chapter Fourteen

LENA GEYER's new ménage in the summer of 1907 was the greatest possible contrast to the romantic one of the five preceding years. Instead of the duke to watch over her she had Elsie deHaven. Instead of the ubiquitous Pierre as major-domo to superintend travelling and domestic arrangements, she had Elsie's prim and correct Mademoiselle. Instead of the French and Austrian retinue provided by the duke, the household consisted of her own Dora, somewhat less surly in this gynæcium than she had been in the previous circumstances, of which she had always disapproved; Elsie deHaven's New York-Irish maid, Nellie; and a cook from Brünn, brought to the doorstep by Dora one morning with the calm announcement that she was the best cook in Europe. To everyone's surprise Anna proved to be worthy of this estimate, and she lived with Lena Geyer on and off for twenty-seven years. When headquarters were maintained in hotels without a permanent household, she would get a job either in New York or Europe. But when summoned by Dora she would leave whatever kitchen she happened to be working in, pack her one suitcase, and after prostrating her employer with a laconic "I go now," disappear, leaving her fabulous *Mandelkuchen* to burn in the oven or her goulash to simmer away on the stove. Thus, whenever Geyer arrived at a new house she always found the table set, the hall fragrant with tantalizing odors, and Anna in calm possession of the kitchen range. Since I still enjoy Anna's cooking at White Plains every Sunday, even though she is seventy years old, it

is no nostalgic memory that makes me say her fried chicken, her potted pigeons, and her roast goose are culinary poems. As for her Bohemian plum dumplings, boiled with blue plums inside and served with melted butter and poppy seeds—or her sorrel soup—no words could praise them enough. And her coffee is surely the best in the world.

In Salzburg Lena and Elsie deHaven began their lifetime of association by sharing a house, which they rented for the summer. It was a small cottage about three miles outside of town, on the road to Hellbrunn. They lived very simply, spending much time with Lilli Lehmann, Lena practising, working on two new rôles, and taking long walks in the mountains. At first Elsie could not believe that life was real. Three months before she had been the black-clad mouse of the sixth-row stall, living only in the sound of Geyer's voice. Now she was Geyer's hourly companion, no longer in black—a woman familiar with a whole new vernacular and capable of asserting herself.

"I cannot imagine what Lena saw in me," she wrote. "We will have to let it go as the same sort of mystery that holds a forceful, handsome, desirable man to a homely little shadow of a wife. I know my love for her gave her something she had never had before. I asked nothing of her except that she be her best self in certain ways, as in the Chartres incident. But every strong character who lives in great activity, in spectacular contact with the world takes comfort in the knowledge that there is deep and tender love hidden somewhere at home. For that, she relied on me. Even after she married Henry Loeffler, who was everything a fine man could be, she clung to me for something she evidently found nowhere else."

"We shared all expenses," Miss deHaven wrote of that first summer together. "There was a great deal about her

early life that Lena never told me and that I gathered from other sources, but I knew how hard she had struggled over money. It seemed impossible to me that anyone could value a five-cent piece as Lena said she used to ; that one should be forced to choose between a street-car fare and something extra for dinner. As soon as Lena began to make money she showed all the characteristics you would expect of someone of her background and experience. She was close with money—there is no use mincing the matter. Where I had been taught to watch my pennies and carefully consider the price of everything because extravagance was vulgar, Lena did so out of an exaggerated sense of the value of each cent. She would haggle with a dressmaker over the cost of a roll of soutache braid, and try to make her throw it in for nothing. She always expected special rates from hotels, steamship companies, modistes, hairdressers, everyone who sold her things, and she got them. I had learned some tricks of paring hotel and travelling expenses from Mademoiselle, but they were amateurish compared with Lena's methods.

"She also had the characteristic impulsive generosity that goes with closeness. She was always very generous with tips, more so than I would ever have been. She demanded more service than most people, but the bellhops and hotel maids were so delighted to find themselves waiting on the great Madame Geyer that they hardly expected tips as large as they received. She was particularly open-handed with waiters, like all people who love to eat.

"My first instinct with Lena was to pay for anything she wanted, because I loved her and had nothing else to do with my money. But I soon realized that paying for more than my share of our expenses would be a great mistake. Now and then I saw traces of stinginess in her that shocked me, and right at the beginning something happened

that made me think. I had bought the tickets from London to Salzburg for our party of five, and paid the excess charges on our vanload of baggage. This came to quite a large sum of money. Then I had bought foreign currency at my London bank, which Lena in her crazy haste had not thought to do, and as we reached each frontier I was the only one in the party who had guilders, marks, and crowns. So I paid for everything. I supposed that Lena would ask me what her share of all this had been, but she did not. After we had been in Salzburg two or three weeks, I made up an account of what she owed me for her fare and Dora's, and all her other expenses. I handed it to her casually one morning when I was helping her to answer letters, and told her what it was. For a moment she glanced at me in thoroughly unguarded surprise. I looked at her without flinching, though I suppose I blushed furiously when I caught her reaction—blushing was a weakness of mine when I was young. Nevertheless I stuck to my gun of silence. When she realized what I was thinking, it was her turn to blush. She grew scarlet. Neither of us said a word. She reached for her checkbook and drew a check on London which she handed me without looking up from the desk. I felt like a wastrel son who had asked his father to pay his debts. The check burned my fingers. Yet I knew I was right; her attitude had proved it.

"Next day she sat back in her chair after breakfast and said she had been thinking how we ought to arrange our finances while we were living together. She said she knew nothing about accounts, all she could do was keep track of her pocket money because that was the kind of sum she had been used to. 'You be the banker,' she said. 'You keep track of everything we spend and put my initials beside every bit of it that belongs to me. Then add it all up once a week and I'll pay my share. Will you?' I said I would. After that

all our financial affairs went through my hands. Lena never knew the details. Once in a while if she suspected that I had been easy and paid too much for a hotel suite or a dry-cleaner, she would investigate. She irritated me when she did that. Sometimes she would come to me triumphantly and say 'Look! I made him take fourteen marks off the bill!' I never got used to this, but there was no use quarrelling with her about it. The system had not been in operation a fortnight before I knew it was the only thing to have done with Lena. If I had paid any of her expenses, even temporarily, she would have drifted into an attitude of expecting it. The inevitable consequence of her using my money would have been using me for my money. She would have had no respect for me. As it was, she had more than respect for me in financial matters; she was afraid of me. This was good for her. It put a kind of backbone into our relationship. I also know that I would ultimately have felt contempt for her if I had not made her pay her own way. In those days her earnings were considerably less than my income. Gradually they increased, until at the end of ten years she was making two or three times my income at the peak of her career. She could then have paid my expenses, and once even suggested it, but I never allowed her to.

"In those days Salzburg was utterly different from today. The Mozart Festival was really a personal labor of love on the part of Lilli Lehmann and the artists she invited to appear with her. Only Mozart operas were given, with the orchestra, chorus, and settings that the Emperor sent from the Hofoper in Vienna. After Lena left the Hofoper she was reluctant to appear with the same company in Salzburg, but Lilli Lehmann prevailed on her to do so, and the performances were wonderful. The modern Salzburg Festival is also wonderful, and I love to go there; somehow I miss

Lena less painfully when I am there. But in the old days, there were no huge international crowds, no automobiles, no uproars over tickets, and no celebrity-chasing. As a matter of fact the little town was given over so exclusively to celebrities that they outnumbered the public that came to hear them.

"Frau Lehmann lived in a charming *Landhaus* at Scharfling-on-the-Mondsee, but spent much of her time in Salzburg. We used to have wonderful days all together, climbing the mountains, rowing on the lakes, and eating delicious things out of enormous picnic baskets. It seems to me we were always eating. Lena and I hired a gig with an old gray horse, and I used to drive her everywhere. I can still see the picture we made, sitting up on top of the high yellow wheels in our full madras dresses and our big hats tied down with veils. Between the brim of her hat and her high ruffled collar, Lena's face used to shine like a full moon. She loved driving, though she was afraid to take the reins herself, and thought it very brave of me to have learned as a child in Tarrytown.

"Frau Lehmann evidently approved of me as a friend for Lena, for she was always very cordial and jolly. She used to meet us at her front gate, dressed in a *Dirndl* with a fringed kerchief and a flowered apron, with Baby, her dachshund, at her heels. Eventually Baby suffered from a goitre and was nursed with the most extravagant care an animal ever received, I am sure. If Lena contradicted all my preconceived ideas of a prima donna, Lilli Lehmann flabbergasted me. She was unquestionably the greatest singer then alive, and one of the greatest of all time. Yet you could hardly have found, except in the marvellous animation of her face and the brilliance of her eyes, a difference between her and any other attractive, cultivated German woman of her age. She spoke

of music with absolute authority, but simply and naturally. I used to sit in an adjoining room sometimes while she worked with Lena, and when listening to Lehmann I was awe-struck by the splendor of her conceptions and the standards she expected Lena to meet. I had thought Lena the ultimate in singing until I heard her teacher. Then only did I realize how much work still lay ahead.

"One day Lena asked Frau Lehmann a question about a phrase in the Contessa's part in the Letter Duet.

"'Let us do it together,' Frau Lehmann said, 'and you will see how I make it with the second voice. You are Susanna.'

"She sat down at the piano and Lena stood behind her. I crept to the doorway and listened behind a curtain. That moment stands alone in my experience. I have heard more thrilling and more exciting music, but for sheer beauty that singing was unique. The voices were inspired. Frau Lehmann was then fifty-nine years old and her voice was not young. But it was rich, fluent and indescribably expressive. It had no reediness, no hollow spots. Lena's sounded brilliant against it. I was deeply moved by the sight of the two women and the significance of their relationship. Nobody could be said to have been strictly Lilli Lehmann's successor, but she did truly hand her sceptre down to Lena Geyer."

The two new-found friends lived five or six weeks of this idyllic life, but toward the end of August, Lena was galvanized by a new development—one for which she had been waiting for many years. The representative of the Metropolitan Opera came to Salzburg to see her. Heinrich Conried, who had succeeded Maurice Grau as general manager, wanted to engage her for the coming season, and Lena was ready to accept. When Maurice Grau was forced by ill health to give up the Metropolitan in 1903, he told Conried

that there was a young woman in Europe named Lena Geyer who would soon be one of his greatest stars; and Grau verified his own opinion by hearing her repeatedly in Europe before his death in 1906. With the departure of Grau the amazing era of his management came to an end, and though Conried retained many of his best artists, and engaged more like Caruso, Chaliapin, Fremstad, Gadski, Farrar, and Geyer, nothing like Grau's casts has been heard anywhere since. Grau had grown rich producing this kind of opera, but Conried lost money, even with his roster of magnificent singers, and it was not until the following year, when Gatti-Casazza took hold, that the Metropolitan entered upon its second—and probably last—era of glory and prosperity.

Frau Lehmann advised Lena to demand a higher fee than Conried had offered, and this was finally set at \$1,000 for each appearance. She contracted to sing eight rôles—Donna Anna, Leonora in *Trovatore*, Aïda, Elisabeth, Sieglinde, Elsa, Eva, and Fidelio. At a glance anyone who remembers his operatic history can put two and two together—Gustav Mahler had also been engaged for the Metropolitan and clearly stipulated what rôles he wanted "*meine Geyer*" to sing. Lena had guest contracts in Stockholm and Munich for October and November that she could not break, so she was to leave for New York after fulfilling them. When Conried's representative came with the Metropolitan contract for her to sign, he looked at her curiously while she was reading it. Her face was full of mischief and her green eyes were dancing.

"Is it true, Madame Geyer," he asked suddenly, "that you are the Lena Geyer who sang at the Metropolitan once before?"

Lena was a tease, and once in a while she used to act like a traditional stage prima donna, grandiose and posing, when

she wanted to make somebody feel like a fool. She had been very haughty with the Metropolitan agent and had spoken to him only in German. Two or three times she even interpolated some English word in a strong accent, which nearly floored Miss deHaven. When this man asked her about the Metropolitan, the corners of her mouth twitched. She looked up from the contract she was reading, and grinned.

"Why Mr. Schindler," she exclaimed in perfectly matter-of-fact English, "don't you ever look at your old programs?"

She signed the contract in her bold, slanting hand, and as she did so exclaimed, "There! That's how I got this name, signing a Metropolitan contract!"

Immediately after the agent left she sent a cable to Maestro Pizzetti, which read: DARLING MAESTRO COMING HOME DECEMBER DEBUT MET WORKING HARD BLESS YOU LENA.

From then until they sailed from Bremen in December, Lena was so excited that there was no keeping up with her. Her life had compassed so many revolutions in such a short time that it would have been a wonder if she were not nervous and on edge. Everything had come to a head all at once. After years of building toward her most precious ideal, coming back in triumph to New York to vindicate all her hardships, she could hardly realize that her aim had been achieved. People told her she was a fool to think as she did; that leaving the Hofoper had been rash folly that she would regret the rest of her days. America knew nothing of music, the opera was trash compared with Vienna or Berlin, and New York was barbarous. But both Lilli Lehmann and Lena knew better; nor did Lena bother to tell any of her critics that she already knew New York and the opera, the stores and the streets and the slums, the public charities and private tragedies, the noise and force and color, and the cold

clear air for which she used to say sometimes, in Europe, that she was suffocating. She went through her final performances in Munich and Stockholm in a daze. Her eyes seemed always fixed on something far ahead and far away.

Every night that she was not singing she went to bed at half-past seven, with a score and a pencil, and sat up against the pillows slowly mouthing her texts and studying them like a fanatic—just as if she had not been singing them before the crowned heads of Europe for five years. It was about this time that she changed Elsie deHaven's name. Miss deHaven had picked up the score of *Lohengrin*, which Lena had left on her bedroom floor, and when Lena wanted it again she could not find it. She was irritated and she dumped all her music and scores out of their racks in a pile in the middle of the floor. She kept up a running comment of curses—"Damn that *dumme Gans*, I didn't want to study it anyway."

"What *dumme Gans*?" Miss deHaven asked with her head in a bureau drawer.

"That *verfluchte* Elsa," Lena scowled. "Such a fool, with those dreams. Just like you."

Suddenly she sat back on her heels and forgot her temper. "*Ach!*" she cried, "What a wonderful discovery! Darling little *dumme Gans!*" She rushed over and hugged her friend. "The only sense that creature ever made," she cried. "She gave me a name for you. Hurrah!—*dumme Gans*—Elsa deHaven"—and breaking into the Wedding March, she seized Elsa by the elbows and marched her smartly around the room.

Chapter Fifteen

"RETURNING to New York was a profound experience for both of us," Miss deHaven wrote. "There never seemed to be any question that I would go with Lena. Once I made some suggestion as if we were not going together and she looked at me with amazement. She never definitely said she expected me to live with her permanently. It was always a casual arrangement, like our ménage at Salzburg, yet we both knew we were settled together. Mademoiselle forestalled the question of her becoming a problem by telling me, late in the fall of 1907, that she saw that her usefulness to me was over and that she was growing too old for any more traipsing about the world. I assured her I did not think so, but we were both relieved to have our arrangement terminated in such a natural way. She wanted to go back to Paris and settle down; I provided for her amply, and she lived there contentedly, with two cats and three canaries, for the rest of her life. She lived to be nearly eighty.

"You can hardly realize what inner revolutions the prospect of America caused both in Lena and in me. She was returning in triumph to the scene of her former poverty and obscurity; I, having left there to worship her from a distance, was returning as her closest friend and companion. And I was entering a world stranger than if I had gone to China, for the New York of my family and the New York of Lena's career were two cities as remote as the poles. Incredible as it may seem, I had never been in a hotel in New York. When we began to plan our living arrangements I

realized that it had never occurred to me that we would not go to my house. But when I mentioned it to Lena she shook her head.

"'Darling, that would be impossible,' she said. 'We must go to a hotel. When I am singing I have to live my own way, eat when I want to, lose my temper if I please. No ordinary household can stand that sort of strain. Your servants would leave. I would not feel like myself in a house. A holiday like Salzburg is all right. But I am not domestic—I don't like the cramped feeling. A hotel is the place for a barbarian like me.'

"I knew she was right, especially when I remembered what my house was like, full of black walnut and horsehair and red velvet and marble table-tops. I could not picture Lena in that setting. At the same time I became suddenly curious about my house. I had not thought of it since my flight in 1905. I wrote Dyckman and inquired. The previous spring he had married Mary Van Sinderen, a girl with whom I had gone to school, who was just the person my parents would have selected for him. She and I have not spent half an hour together in twenty-five years. Dyckman and Mary were planning to live in the house that winter, since he took it for granted he would never hear from me about it. His answer to my inquiry was so ill-natured that Lena—we always talked over such things together—snapped with vindictiveness. At her instigation I wrote Dyckman that I had no objection to his using the house but I saw no reason why he should not pay me rent for it. His reply contained a check for six months' rent and the observation that since I was planning to return with my opera-singer friend, who would doubtless not care to meet him, he would not intrude upon her by meeting our boat.

"But Lena's Maestro did meet it. As we came alongside

the pier she stood at the forward rail, peering down into the crowd. Suddenly, before I could stop her, she let out the full force of her powerful lungs in an ecstatic cry—“*Maestro!*” Brünnhilde never made a more stirring ejaculation.

“Out in the snow on the end of the pier I saw a bearded man in a black slouch hat and a long overcoat, jumping up and down like a child and holding out his arms to her. I thought she would have a fit of nerves before the ship was tied up and we were off. At the bottom of the gangplank she rushed into his arms and they stood there regardless of the crowd and confusion, with tears running down their cheeks, embracing and kissing, then holding each other at arm’s length and looking into each other’s faces, and then hugging and kissing again. I was dreadfully embarrassed by such a demonstration in public, and hurried off to help Dora round up the luggage, but they were absolutely oblivious. Two children of nature, in one of the big moments of their lives.

“I was rather upset myself. It was only natural that Lena should overlook me in the excitement of meeting her *Maestro*, and I did not mind that. But it was the first of a thousand instances in which some big emotion swept her past me into a superworld of her own, comparable only to her hours on the stage. It was then that I realized how I had cut myself off from every other soul and contact in the world. My brother was the last person on earth I cared to see, but the fact that he had ignored me at a moment when she too must ignore me left me desperately lonely and forlorn. I saw then that giving up my life to Lena was not all joy and happiness. I was destined for many disillusioning hours, particularly disillusioning to someone who was shy and proud.

“Dora and Nellie had their hands full with the customs,

though Maestro Pizzetti had had the forethought to bring someone along with him who facilitated the complicated matter of declaring Lena's costumes in bond. Maestro himself had no idea of what was going on, and stood by clinging to Lena's arm and talking so fast that my head whirled. The harder and faster they talked the more impossible it was to make sense with the customs inspector. I turned to Lena and told her to go on ahead to the hotel in a cab with the Maestro—I would follow when the baggage was cleared. She realized at that instant that she had not even introduced us. She overwhelmed me with apologies and told us that we were her two best and only friends in the world, we must love each other—and seizing us each by the elbow shoved us into each other's arms. I was crimson with embarrassment. The Maestro beamed and nodded and said '*Grazie, grazie,*' over and over, nobody knew exactly for what.

"At last we were all collected and disposed at the Plaza. We went there quite casually, just because the manager of the Bristol in Berlin had told Lena she would like it. As it turned out, she lived there on and off all her life. That evening, the Maestro told us, he and Luisa (his wife) were expecting us to dinner. I tried to beg off, feeling that I had no place in this reunion, but Lena was suddenly as conscious of my isolation as she had been oblivious that morning. She insisted that I come.

"Pizzetti had found himself so lonely within a year after Lena's departure for Germany that for the first time the idea of marriage had occurred to him. He had made a happy match with the niece of Lena's benefactor, Antonio Lucarelli. The Maestro could not be said to be in love with his wife in our romantic American sense, but it was a good, comfortable marriage that gave him two children and a pleasant home.

All his tenderer feelings and his idealization of the things he treasured were centred in Lena.

"I had never seen anything like the Pizzetti household. They lived in a high-stoooped house in West Seventy-eighth Street, near Central Park, which Uncle Lucarelli had given them for a wedding present. The good old gentleman had died some years before, but we were met on the doorstep by his namesake, little Antonio, a wildly excited dark-eyed boy of seven, bouncing up and down on the threshold with his five-year-old sister. Behind them stood Luisa, a beaming, plump-faced Italian woman with full bosom and broad hips, whom Lena had never seen. They greeted each other with a shy kiss. Little Antonio seized Lena's hat and furs and ran to hang them up, shouting and screaming through the hall. Luisa took my wraps, shrugging in a helpless way about the noise. I was bewildered, and I retreated to a corner of the sitting room where I watched the Pizzettis celebrate. We had dinner downstairs in the basement dining room, and when Luisa uncovered an enormous tureen of steaming spaghetti, Lena leaned over it, inhaling its savor with her eyes closed. Then she rushed to Maestro and threw her arms around his neck. 'You made it!' she cried. '*Grazie, grazie, carissimo mio!*' She ate it like someone half-crazed with hunger. Then Luisa brought in chicken *cacciatora*, and a couple of vegetables I had never tasted before, and we had Italian bread and Chianti. Then there was a huge wooden bowl of salad, a marvellous cheese, and coffee and Italian brandy that Maestro said he had saved since the night Lena had sung for Grau and Lazzaro in his flat nearly ten years before. Silence fell as he lifted his glass and looked at her. I have never seen a more exquisite quality of love in human eyes. Luisa and I stole a glance at each other; we were both deeply moved. But Lena suddenly rose from her chair and

stood beside him for a moment; then she crumpled down on her knees and buried her head in his lap, with her arms around him.

"The whole scene was a thing of awe and intense sentiment. A new Lena was revealed, someone I never dreamed of; a child, humble, and passionate with gratitude, and absolutely unashamed to show it. To me, with a background in which frozen propriety was the only standard of behavior, it was overwhelming. Anything less sincere would have been rather horrible, for uncontrolled emotions always make me flinch. In this woman of thirty-two, whom I had first seen as the queen of her world, the awkward and struggling girl of crude peasant birth was completely revealed to me for the first time. That moment gave me my first real insight into her origin.

"Lena's joy of reunion with her Maestro was repeated in a less passionate measure at her meeting with Gustav Mahler. She had planned to go down to the Opera the first morning after our arrival, and see him there, but as we stepped into the elevator at the Plaza, when we returned from the Pizzettis' that first night, she let out a cry of delight and threw her arms around the neck of a short, homely, spectacled man who was standing in the car. It was Mahler.

"In one breath they asked each other, 'What are you doing here?' and each answered 'I live here!' They spoke German, so excitedly and so fast that I could not follow what they were saying, and when I went to bed they were still in Lena's drawing room, drinking hot milk and exchanging all the experiences that had intervened since their parting the year before in Vienna. After her dramatic support of him in the crisis it may be imagined what Mahler's feelings about her were, and it was always hard for me to understand why he was considered so disagreeable and quarrelsome. While I

was still in the room I heard him ask her about the Duc de Chartres, and she answered with a gesture—a very sweet one—of regret and resignation and finality. He nodded wisely and, I thought, approvingly.

"The days flew by as she prepared for her début at the Metropolitan. She came back from her first rehearsal bubbling with talk. A few people at the opera house remembered her, or thought they did; Ceccarini had died two years ago, and Herrmann had gone to South America, but some of the chorus and supers knew her. In her attitude toward them she was nothing short of magnificent, though it would have been within the pettier elements of her character to have pretended not to remember them. Some things about her past she definitely denied or feigned to forget. Perhaps some people would call that small, but one must know a self-made person very intimately, and be close to his heart-breaking struggles, before criticising him for such an attitude."

"Lena was to make her Metropolitan début as Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*. Mahler selected it for her in preference to a Wagnerian rôle as there were already in the company two splendid new Wagner singers, Olive Fremstad and Johanna Gadski. Lena was a finer voice and a more versatile singer than either of them, and he wanted to display her more unique accomplishments—Mozart and Beethoven. The memory of that *Don Giovanni* cast makes my blood tingle to this day. It was: Geyer (Donna Anna), Emma Eames (Donna Elvira), Marcella Sembrich (Zerlina), Scotti (Don Giovanni), Alessandro Bonci (Don Ottavio) and Chaliapin (Leporello)—the latter an impersonation nobody could forget. The whole setting glowed with their refulgence and with the powerful inspiration of Mahler in the pit. Lena

did not make this début as an unknown; she already had a great European reputation and most music lovers knew her name. Many of them had heard her in Paris or Vienna or London. But to the New York public she was new. The judgment they rendered that night never wavered for the nineteen years of her American career.

"As the magnificently played overture ended, and the curtains parted on Chaliapin, I realized that we were in for a remarkable performance. He sang his *Notte e giorno* with the most wicked insinuation and devilish grimaces, then crouched at the side, and my heart rose straight into my throat as Lena, struggling with Scotti, appeared on the steps at the left. Twenty minutes before she had sworn to me that she was not nervous, but I had seen a pulse in her temple twitching and felt her hand like cold wax as I kissed it. I always kissed her hand before performances on account of the make-up on her face. Maestro and Herr Mahler had both stopped in her dressing room to give their blessings, and there had met for the first time. The three had exchanged mutual looks of admiration and resolution that would have inspired anyone.

"All this was travelling through my head when I realized that Lena was singing and that I was so wrought up I had actually not heard her. I sat up with a start. She did this opening scene of the opera with finesse, imagination, and musicianship completely beyond other singers, and made it pitifully real where many only make it ridiculous. Her voice was its very best. She was singing with all the technical perfection that Maestro and Lilli Lehmann combined could have desired, but beyond that she had in fullest measure that electrical thrill, that utterly physical surge which used to make us all helpless with emotion. As she and Scotti, who was then in his brilliant youth, finished the duet, there was

deafening applause. I listened in a daze to Eames singing '*Ah! chi mi dice mai!*' which is difficult in that its angry emotion tends to make any woman shrewish, and it did her. In that trio Scotti and Chaliapin were two romping devils, and then the great Russian sang his *Catalogo* aria in inimitable style. Sembrich came next, in what many think was her loveliest part, and I was never so charmed as by her Zerlina that night. I believe those critics who say that no singer ever matched the absolute perfection of her style.

"But I was too intent on Lena to pay thorough attention to anyone else. The great moment came at last, when she began the passionate recitative about her father's murder. Then I do not remember breathing again, for she launched (with such fabulous accompaniment from Mahler!) into *Or sai chi l'onore*, with an attack that made me hot and cold with excitement as I listened. I think there is no more dramatic aria in music, and Lena not only extracted every drop of its vengeful meaning, but added to it the indescribable quality of her own passions. People around me were literally gasping as she sang; I know she had never thrilled an audience like that before. The situation had excited her to the highest possible peak and she outdid herself in every way, but you must remember that she never sacrificed one particle of her technique. She had that so well in command that she could build on it unfalteringly, as on a foundation.

"The way she sang those A's rings in my ears to this day. When she finished, the applause started with a sudden terrific impact more shouting than handclapping. There have been other ovations like that one and you remember some of them, but nobody hears very many in a lifetime. If Lena had made that début as Elsa, for instance, the excitement would not have been the same. She keyed the whole evening with her tremendous conception of Donna Anna and the electrical

force of her singing. When I went back after the first act, just after the big concerted finale outside Don Giovanni's palace, she was standing in her dressing room struggling to reach a broken garter. 'I broke the damn thing curtseying!' she whispered. I ignored the garter and tried to tell her what it was like out in front. She shook her head impatiently. She was extremely excited but noticed only her garter. 'You never sang like that before, Lena,' I said. 'All right, all right,' she snapped, 'but for God's sake fix my garter!' Dora approached at this moment with a threaded needle, frowning more than usual. Inwardly she must have been in a turmoil like me—she had heard the singing from the wings. But she only drew down the corners of her mouth and said something brusquely in Czech. Lena turned quiet at once.

"She lay down on her side on the couch, with her skirts pulled up and her back turned to Dora, so she could sew the garter, and that was how Conried found her when he burst in to exult about her singing!

"In the second act she was just as magnificent. When she stood alone before her father's portrait in the chapel and began to sing *Non mi dir bel'idol mio* I could not keep from weeping. The peculiarity of this aria is that its *piano* beginning seems to shut many singers up so that they turn reedy in its beautiful opening phrase. Lena's *pianissimo* as every one knows had the same completeness as all her other tones, just as round as her biggest full notes, but softened by such phenomenal control that I never grew used to the wonder of it. Her audience was as stirred by it as by the dramatic fire of her first aria, and during the coloratura section at the end they were all on edge. I thought of Maestro Pizzetti, who was responsible for that part of her training, and how happy he must be. She finished in the noblest breadth of classic style. The applause was even wilder than after the first act.

"Lena had somehow not thought what the rush to her dressing room would be like, or how much bolder New Yorkers are than Europeans. By the time I had made my way across the stage there was a crowd in the narrow hallway all trying to get in. The room was already filled with people. Lena was sitting in the corner surrounded by an excited ring of jabbering strangers, trying to smile and be polite, but inwardly, I could see, terrified. She caught my eye and gave me a beseeching look. I was too timid to tell any of these people to leave. I felt helpless, but just then I saw Maestro Pizzetti in the doorway. He knew many of the people and stood not the least in awe of the rest, so in a few moments he had cleared the room, and we were left alone, we three with Dora. She was standing in the corner, frowning as usual, impatiently waiting to undress her mistress. Lena jumped up, seized her by the shoulders and shouted '*Dummkopf!* How do you like America?'

"Dora shrugged and said something in Czech. She had got Lena partly undressed, very shocked because Lena was so busy going over the performance with the Maestro that she refused to go behind the screen to take her clothes off, when there was a loud knock on the door. Looking out, I saw Mahler and admitted him. Dora reached for a peignoir, but Lena leaped, half-naked, to the door, and seized Mahler's hands in hers. For a moment she looked helplessly from him to Maestro Pizzetti. There was much excited discussion of the performance, Maestro being nearly beside himself, for he had never heard such conducting. 'Wait,' Mahler said. 'Wait a few weeks until we give *Fidelio* and then you will have something to be proud of.' He motioned toward Lena. She was hastily putting on her old red velvet robe and her carriage boots, but when Dora looked for the woolen cloak, hanging on its peg, it was not there. Signalling her to be

quiet, I slipped behind Lena and put over her shoulders a new cloak of mink, lined with crimson velvet, with a full shirred hood of the fur. When she felt it in place of her own cloak she whirled round and seized me. She was too overcome to say anything, and flinging out one side of the cloak she caught me inside it and we all ran out to the carriage. In the street the waiting crowd began to shout the moment Lena appeared on the step, and we had to fight our way across the pavement. Lena was carrying an armful of my yellow roses and they were torn away from her before she realized it. All four of us squeezed into the carriage and drove to the Plaza. 'I'm so hungry,' Lena exclaimed on the way there, 'I could eat a horse.' But when the supper actually came, and Herr Mahler rose to drink her health, she could not answer. She looked at us for a moment with her eyes full of tears, and said, 'I'm frightened. Nobody deserves to have so much.' "

Chapter Sixteen

"IN MY BUSINESS," George Phillips said, indicating with his finger that that would be enough seltzer, "we used to hear of all the big European artists before they were brought to this country. Usually they came here as opera singers at the Met, then if they caught on with the public we concert managers would try to sign 'em up for ourselves and send 'em out on tour. It's still done about the same way, the only difference being that the concert business has got decrepit in its old age. Geyer was the last of the giants, you might say, the last of the three-thousand-dollar guarantee girls. Managing her was no cinch, but it brought in the dough."

We were sitting at our usual table in what had formerly been a speakeasy on West Fifty-sixth Street, a rendezvous for managers, publicity men, music critics, and other freaks who depended for their livelihood upon the doings over at Carnegie Hall. We had between us the usual dirty tablecloth, acrid ash-tray, and blue seltzer bottle. We had dined on the usual antipasti, spaghetti, and meat balls, and it was now ten o'clock and we had reached the whiskey-and-soda stage. It had taken a long time to get George warmed up to the subject of this book. Indeed, one might say that it had taken years. I had met him first in 1920 when I was a Senior at Columbia and was arranging an undergraduate concert series. For some reason or other he had taken a liking to me, and sometimes he used to send me tickets to his artists' recitals, or even take me out for a drink afterward and ask me what I thought about the concert. Of course this was

long before I had any idea of writing a book about Lena Geyer; but he soon discovered that I worshipped her, and I think our respective feelings about her, so different in manifestation but so alike at heart, constituted the real basis of our friendship.

George is what you mean when you call somebody a "card." He is small and skinny and wrinkled, with a thin layer of hair combed over his bald spot and a cigar perpetually spilling ashes down his vest. For me, at any rate, he has always typified the American male, I suppose because his exterior is so hard-boiled, while at the same time he is soft to the point of sentimentality inside. There are two highlights on his character—a sense of humor that I have never seen daunted, and a shrewdness that figuratively takes my breath away when I think about it. He has very little education yet he can circulate among the most cultivated people with perfect ease. In a sense he knows far less about singing than I do, but in a more practical way he knows more than I can ever hope to learn. Though he speaks no language other than his own uncouth American, and though he ridicules foreigners like a schoolboy, he can walk unabashed into a gathering of singers and virtuosi, no matter of what nationality, and come away with some contract that the more refined managers have tried to get for years. I do not know how he does it, and I have never met anyone (including Lena herself) who could tell me.

He is the most profane man I have ever known, but his profanity is not particularly imaginative or colorful. He does not make a specialty of bad words, he merely repeats the same ones over and over again. "Bastard" is his usual term for a man; if he likes the man he will call him a good old bastard, and if he dislikes him, a lousy bastard. No singer is just a singer, she is a God-damn singer. Everything he

wants is either in hell or in Christ, and when he does not approve of something he says "nuts." Lena Geyer was amused by his vernacular and even adopted some of his slang; but Miss deHaven was at first inexpressibly shocked, and I do not think she ever quite got used to having George around. They were poles apart. Yet each had salt in his nature, and each recognized it in the other.

George is nobody's yes-man, and even after Geyer told him that she wanted him to help me put this book together, he insisted that the idea was, in his words, hooey. "What d'you want to write a lot of God-damn bunk about Lena for?" he would say. "There's never been a sensible book about an opera singer and the reason is it can't be done. You'll get bogged down in stinking sentimentality, and the first thing you know you'll make a movie queen out of Lena instead of a singer." The idea tickled him and he sat chuckling over it and wagging his wizened head. "Jeez," he said. "Geyer on a Hollywood set!"

It was a year or so before I got my idea of the book through his head. I was not going to romanticize Lena, and I kept telling him so. I was not going to twist anything around to make it come out right in the end, and I wanted as many documents as I could get. I intended, I told him, to put Lena on paper *as a singer*, to show her artistic and personal problems, to trace the whole varied course of her life from its hard-bitten origins to the full splendour of her later years, and tell how and why that miracle was accomplished. He was impressed by this, but he was not convinced, and in the end he was won over by one of those simple, human things that occur almost by accident. In trying to define my idea I said that what I wanted from him was an ungarnished account of his experiences with Lena, and that I wanted this so badly that I would print his account word for word as he

told it. He looked at me, then, and his mouth opened as if he were going to say something caustic. But he did not. "You mean," he said, "you want to print her like I knew her?"

"Quite," I said. "And more than that, I want to print her in the way you *say* you knew her."

"Jesus Christ," he said. "That wouldn't be so bad. But you couldn't print the God-damn thing."

"Why not?"

"Well," he said, "for one thing, I'm illiterate, and for another I can't control my language. I used to try, when Lena married Henry Loeffler, but it wasn't any damn use. I just don't know when I'm cussing, Dave. The fact is I don't really cuss, it's just like you use commas and things."

There was such unexpected pathos in his voice that I had to laugh. "We can leave the cuss words out," I said.

He leaned forward aggressively. "Sure. That's right. And you'll leave a lot of other stuff out, too. That's just the point, God-damn it——"

And so on and so on. But we finally reached an agreement; everything was to be set down exactly as George expressed it, and then he and I would edit the record together. We even started off with a stenographer, but George did not like that and was the first to suggest that she be abandoned. As a matter of fact I have a peculiar auditory memory, a faculty that I have always believed to be connected with my passion for music, though I suppose some psychologists would not agree. After an evening with George I can go home and write down everything he said, almost word for word, and do a little discreet editing at the same time. That is the device we hit on, and that is the source of what follows.

"I doubt," George said, "whether Geyer was a concert singer at all. That's a surprising thing for me to say after

all that's happened and after all the dough that we both made out of her concert work, but I think she'd agree with me if she were sitting here now looking back over it. Geyer was one hundred per cent artist. She approached every problem in her life like an artist, and the concert stage was just one of those problems. Back there in the twenties I guess she was the most popular concert singer in the country, a successor you might say to Alma Gluck, though not really like her, because Gluck was a natural-born concert artist and Geyer wasn't. Geyer *taught* herself to sing concerts—which was the difference. But we'll come to all that later.

"You can divide her concert career into two periods, the early one that started right after her first season at the Met, and the later one just before she retired. The second was the most important one because she proved to herself and everybody else that she was a great lyric singer, and I mean in comparison with the greatest we've ever had. But I'm going to leave that second period aside now, we can get to it later. There's a lot of things you got to know about the earlier one if you really want to understand what Geyer was all about.

"I knew about Geyer quite a while before she turned up at the Met in 1907. In fact, I'd heard about her as far back as 1896, though I can't say as I really remembered that in 1907. You see, I got off to kind of a slow start, my father never had any dough, and back in the nineties I wasn't much better than an office boy in that joint I worked in—you know, the Reichmann outfit. So I wasn't particularly aware of a singer doing bits under Grau, and I don't suppose I ever would have remembered it at all if I hadn't made it my business to learn everything there was to know about Geyer so's I could land her as a client. I guess I have to thank Joe Hofheim, who was my partner then, for my success in that direction. Joe had heard her sing at the Vienna opera, and when he

came back raving about her like a schoolgirl I told him for Christ's sake to grow up, was he trying to develop his vocabulary or what? Singers, I said, were good, bad, or indifferent; if he thought she was good we'd have a crack at her when she got here, otherwise he was wasting his breath.

"Well, we went to her début at the Met, and like everybody else in the house I was knocked flat. The woman was everything they said about her and a lot more. She was the first singer I ever heard who got the kind of enthusiasm from me that I used to laugh at in everybody else. I'd have gone to South Africa to hear her sing after that evening. She had everything. But above all she was exciting—so exciting that you forgot all about the claptrap of opera while she was on the stage and lost yourself in the part she was playing. There really never was another voice like hers, and if I say it you can believe it because voices are my business and have been for nearly forty years.

"So bright and early the morning after her début Joe Hofheim and I sat in the office figuring how to get this girl under contract before anybody else did. I guess it was the biggest single problem in salesmanship I ever faced. Lena was a sure-enough wow. She had come to New York with a European reputation that stretched from London to St. Petersburg, and we didn't have to read more than two or three reviews of her first performance to realize that the New York critics had run out of adjectives. It was a cinch that every concert manager in the U. S. was sitting in his office, just like Joe and me, with the same idea—to get her out of the God-damn Met and onto the road. In those days the Met used to do most of the concert booking for its own artists, and take most of the percentage too, which was the way it generally managed to lose the artists that turned out to be popular in concert. One or two seasons of singing

concerts chiefly for the Met's benefit, and the singers would decide that they'd rather give up the opera and make some money on their own. That's how we managers made a living, and when you got a girl like this Geyer there was a general declaration of war all 'round—between the managers and the Met, and between the managers and the managers, if you see what I mean.

"Now up to that point Joe and I had done pretty well. We had Sembrich, and we had people like dePachmann and Ysaye, so everybody in the music racket knew we weren't just bums. But still, we weren't tops either. Sembrich was our big card, but we'd had some good breaks in landing her and we had never yet stepped out and picked up a big-time singer cold. I was hell-bent to do it now, because I'd just married my Annie, and it wasn't only that we needed dough, we were ambitious. As for Joe, if we hadn't got Geyer I think he would have died. Anyway, it was Joe who cracked the nut, mostly. Geyer was a big mystery in 1907—she never went around and although she lived in a suite in the Plaza she'd hardly ever see anybody and was inaccessible as hell. No one knew where she spent her time or who was intimate with her, except a few insiders; and these were the people that Joe had made it his business to know. It seemed that she had only one intimate friend in New York—old Giulio Pizzetti, the singing teacher, who had taught her when she was a kid. Pizzetti was pretty well known, of course, but he had a kind of hankering after the old days, and since Grau and his friend Ceccarini had died, he had lived kind of a quiet life with his wife and kids and a few musikers that didn't amount to much. But Joe was on the ball and made it a point to meet him. And that's how we got next to Geyer. The old gent was as anxious as anybody else that Geyer shouldn't be taken advantage of by the Met. He talked

her into giving us an interview, and being the boss of our concern I elected myself to do the selling.

"I was kind of nervous when I rang the bell of her suite in the Plaza. Word had got around that Pop Adams, who became Gluck's manager a little later, had approached Geyer, and that she had turned him down flat and said that she never intended to sing any concerts—just opera. But anyway I pushed on. I didn't get more than two steps into the room, though, when I met this here deHaven. That was a shock. I had heard the gossip about the French duke, and if I didn't exactly expect to see him there twirling his mustachios, I certainly didn't expect to be met by a Priscilla out of *Godey's Lady's Book*. I couldn't make out what the hell she was doing there with Geyer, but I soon found out that she was always with her and was absolutely nuts about her. Geyer must have liked it or she wouldn't have had her around. I hadn't spoken ten words before I thought Elsie deHaven was going to faint, because apparently I let fall a Christ or a God-damn, or something. It was kind of awkward and I was pretty sore at myself; but you know me, Dave, I can't put on airs or pretend I'm a highbrow. They can take me or leave me. That's the way I've always worked, and I figure it's the best in the end because nobody's ever disillusioned afterward.

"But that first interview didn't come off very good. Part of it was my fault, I admit. I hadn't doped this gal right at all. She had such an enormous reputation, and there had been so much gossip about that duke and his finery, that I was all set to deal with a real honest-to-God prima donna like you find in the magazine serials. I knew their tricks all right and I was determined not to let Geyer get away with any of 'em, so you might say I was suspicious of her from the start. But she was just as suspicious of me, too. She kept looking at me with a fishy expression, as much as to

say that she thought I was a bloodsucker, out to take advantage of her as a foreigner. I had to thank my stars for Joe Hofheim, because it was a cinch that if Pizzetti hadn't asked her to see me she'd have thrown me right out.

"Still, there were things about that first interview that encouraged me some. She asked me if I wanted a drink, and I said I did. I suppose I expected a cream de mint or something, but when she asked me if I wanted whiskey I sat up straight and said yes, and if she had rye I'd prefer that. Well, you know, it was a little thing, but I was impressed when that rye was dragged out and it turned out to be Overholt. If you've ever travelled around Europe you know how hard it is to get good whiskey of any kind, let alone Pittsburgh's best, and the fact that she had gone to the trouble of stocking up with a real American drink just a few weeks after arriving in this country gave me a clue to her character that I was never to forget. I took out a cigar and asked her if she minded, and she said right out that she did. So I said that was all right, I wouldn't light it. That's how it happened I was always chewing an unlighted cigar when I was with Geyer. People used to make remarks about it, as if there was anything unnatural in that.

"We got down to business pretty quick. Geyer said she understood I wanted to be her concert manager and I said I did, and asked if she had one of those Metropolitan contracts giving them concert percentages. She looked at me for a minute with the kind of a shrewd look a Jew will turn on before coming to the point—though she wasn't a Jew—and said, 'Mr. Phillips, did you think I was a stranger to the Metropolitan?' I admitted I didn't, not exactly. 'So if they had any tricks I would know them, wouldn't I?' she asked. She was a wonderful woman. Here she'd been in Europe for ten years and she spoke English like anybody else in New

York—not that she shouldn't, but show me how many prima donnas from the Vienna Hofoper and God knows what other royal houses would show up in New York talking plain English.

"Geyer then handed me the surprise of my life by telling me that she had never really sung in concert and that while she was pleased by my offer she didn't know whether she had the right to consider it. 'Do you mean you've never sung a concert?' I asked. I couldn't believe my ears. 'Not exactly that,' she said. It seemed that the only concerts she had sung had been those command performances in palaces before royalty—you know, she said, a couple of big arias and two groups of Lieder, and then the order of this or that with a big medal and some indigestible supper and home. I laughed some at that. But pretty soon I got serious and explained to her what concert business was in the United States. With her reputation she ought to clean up more money than anybody in the world. Like most opera singers she'd never bothered to get the real contrast between America and Europe—here there's only one opera house and plain people don't go to it anyway. But let somebody go out on the road and sing concerts and there won't be a Main Street in Dakota that won't have heard of her. This was all news to Geyer, not that she mightn't have figured it out for herself, but she'd never bothered to. She'd come back to the United States to sing at the Met, and nothing else seemed to be of any importance.

"While I was talking she kept looking at me with a sort of quizzical expression and finally she asked me why I thought she'd be any good as a concert singer. There was a big difference between that and opera. I told her I knew right away as soon as she opened her mouth that with that kind of a voice and personality she could sing anything. 'The dif-

ference between you and most opera singers,' I told her, 'is that the others depend on the costume and scenery and story and all the other make-believe to give 'em personality and glamour. You make your own glamour as you go along, and you could make it on the concert stage just as well as on the operatic stage.' That pleased her, I guess. But I saw right away that she wasn't one of the girls you could land with a little flattery, because pretty soon she frowned and said that that might be true enough, but the concert stage required a different technique and she wasn't sure whether she could master it, or even wanted to try.

" 'Of course,' I said, 'the main reason for going into the concert business is the money you can make out of it.'

" 'For instance,' she said.

" 'Well,' I said, 'how much are you making at the Met?'

" 'One thousand a performance,' she said, 'for this season.'

"I told her that after one season on the road she could get a concert guarantee of three thousand at the very least, and with two or three concerts a week she could see what that would come to. She looked pretty impressed, but she wasn't sold by a damn sight. She asked me what a tour would be like, and I began telling her. You know I'm a pretty straight guy, Dave, and I honestly did try to describe a concert tour the way it really is. But as I look back on it now I have to laugh, because concert-touring with Geyer turned out to be something different from anything God ever thought up before. What I knew about touring then was just kindergarten stuff, as I'll show you in a minute. But anyway. As I was talking you ought to have seen Geyer's face. When I first came into the room she had been pretty much on her dignity and kind of cold, but I no sooner got to describing life in the sticks than she leaned forward and looked at me like a little girl listening to a fairy story. I'd only meant to be up there

about half an hour, but it was two hours later when I looked at my watch, and I was still talking and she wouldn't let me stop. It seemed she couldn't hear enough about Texas and Iowa and the Pacific coast and the Mississippi River and those damned prairie ovens out in Kansas.

"I knew Joe would be passing kittens down at the office, so eventually I had to break up the meeting of my own accord. I swear, though I'd been there maybe three hours altogether, she didn't want me to leave. Elsa deHaven was fidgeting, and Dora, the maid, kept popping into the room and glaring at me and saying things to Geyer in Czech, but she kept waving them away and telling me to go on. So I learned something. I learned that Lena had a kind of passion for America, the kind that the immigrants have. This is stronger sometimes, and always more romantic, than the way we born Americans feel. I guess maybe you'll be able to explain it in your book—it goes back to Lena's childhood in some way. Anyhow, it was the thing that got Lena and me started together, and held us together for the rest of our days. She used to say the only reason she went into concerts was because I sold her America in that first interview. I know she was kind of joking, but I know too that her feeling about this country was what induced her to put up with the things she had to put up with on the road. And in a way, it was why she had a liking for me, too.

"It took a long time to bring Lena around to the idea of singing concerts. That first winter she was so excited over seeing Pizzetti and Mahler again that she didn't want to put her mind on anything else. After I had got to know her a little—I used to go back to see her when the show broke, or in the afternoon at the hotel—she explained to me that having Pizzetti and Mahler together, in the same place at the same time, made her feel as if two big rivers had met and

joined into one. She was a funny woman that way, independent as they come, and yet damn dependent on her friends and sentimental about 'em. The three of 'em used to sit around in her parlor drinking red ink and going over every note she'd ever sung, in Vienna with Mahler and in New York when Pizzetti was her teacher. Once I described her life to Sam as one long happy post-mortem, and somehow it got back to her and she laughed and said I was just a hard-boiled son of a bitch—or words to that effect. She grew to like me though, and one night she asked me down to sit in on her gang. I was kind of quiet that time and didn't say much, but I had a hunch I'd crashed the charmed circle and that things were going to come my way sooner or later.

"Don't mistake me, Dave. I was after this girl as a client sure enough, but I've got to confess she put the Indian sign on me too. I mean, I wasn't ever in love with her exactly—she was too big for me, and anyway I had Annie, and Annie was my type. If you can picture me making a pass at Geyer you've got a better imagination than I was born with. But as I say I was moonstruck—you couldn't see her all the time and not be. I don't think I ever could have advised her to do anything against her own interests, no matter how much I might have stood to gain. This doesn't make me out to be a Christer, it was just the way she affected anybody that had anything to do with her, from Dora up to the duke.

"But if you're really going to be honest in your book, you better put this down: Geyer was a damn limited person. She was the most limited person I ever met, and when I look back on it I don't see how it was possible for a woman of her glamour and reputation to get through life with so few real friends, and so few real interests, for that matter. She was an important person, but she wasn't broad. She was vertical, not horizontal, if you see what I mean. You can count

the people she opened up to on the fingers of one hand, and the things she was interested in on the fingers of the other. I guess that's the way a person gets to be great, but it used to worry me and it still does. Me, I'm interested in a dozen different things all at the same time and if I'm not mixing around with people I get restless. And of course that's my trade. But even at the other extreme—and I admit that a lot of the big-time singers belong there—I've never seen anybody that lived in as small a world as Geyer.

"I don't think it was a good thing either. So far as I know—and I know a lot—Lena never looked at a pair of pants just as pants, and you can't tell me that's the way things ought to be. Of course I don't know what her attitude toward this duke was, and I don't know whether she really did have a lot of lovers over in Europe, the way they say she did. I never asked her, and she probably would have told me to go to hell if I had asked. But on this side you can take it from me there wasn't anybody.

"Now I see you're looking at me kind of funny and I know who you've got in mind. I confess I'm just as puzzled as you are, and if I was going to make an exception to what I just said it would be this here Guido Vestri. Of course you heard him as much as I did, and you know a lot more about why he was a good conductor than I do, but when you asked me the other day what I knew about him personally I realized what a kid you are—you weren't old enough to get around and hear about him back in the old days."

George was quite right when he said I was too young to have heard much about the personal life of Guido Vestri. And when I began to gather the material for this book, I naturally attempted to turn to Vestri himself as I had to all of Lena's other intimate associates. I received a rebuff so frigid and so conclusive that there was no possible way of

pursuing the matter further. My personal mortification was only exceeded by my distress at the serious handicap to my work. I was forced to gather what I now know of Vestri in a hundred indirect ways, and so much gossip drifted into my hands that it became difficult to separate the hearsay from the possible truth. Of course I knew Guido Vestri only as a conductor, and one of the greatest; the most wonderful experiences of my life were the operas he conducted with Lena Geyer singing. Beyond that I knew only that he was an excitable, eccentric bachelor, a genius, and a man who had his way with everything and everybody around the opera house. As a boy I was so awestruck by the music that Vestri and Lena made together that I never really thought about them as a man and a woman. It was not until I began putting Lena's life to intimate scrutiny that I realized how profound had been Vestri's influence upon it. The deeper I probed, the more clearly I saw that he was the mainspring not only of her singing, but of her whole idea of mature life. So when George mentioned Guido Vestri, I very naturally encouraged him to tell me all he knew of the man; no detail seemed too minute to be important.

"Vestri came to the Met some years before Lena did," George said. "I can't remember just when it was. He came to conduct the Italian operas. At least that's the way he started, but he didn't stay put in the Italian stuff, which was what raised all the hell. He was the God-damnedest musician I ever heard, and I know you agree. He was born somewhere near Naples in one of those big Wop families full of fiddlers and singers, and I think as a kid he used to work in a travelling opera company with his parents, in the chorus or something like that. They were always broke. When he was about ten he was

already letting on what a natural-born genius he was—he used to holler and have fits if he heard anybody play or sing wrong. They sent him to the Naples Conservatory and he turned out to be a pianist. After he graduated, though, he wasn't interested in the piano. He went right back to the God-damn opera and got a job as rehearsal pianist—what's the long word they call it?—hell—correpetiteur.

“You can imagine how he liked sitting at a piano taking orders from plumbers, but it wasn't long before he became a conductor himself. I got the story from Lena, and it's worth repeating because I never heard it anywhere else and I doubt if you have. It seems that one day the regular conductor was late to a rehearsal and Vestri began without him. *He had the whole cast in the room and he played the piano and conducted and started ripping hell out of the first act of Traviata*, I think it was. When the regular conductor got there he heard that act for the first time in his life. He stood there like a dope for a few minutes, and then the damn fool went so crazy with jealousy that instead of sitting down to find some nice back-handed way to get rid of the kid, he rushed to the manager and said he wanted Vestri fired. The manager asked what Vestri was doing and the conductor was too excited to talk sense—he just stood there bellowing; so the manager ran to the rehearsal room to see what it was all about, and the minute he got inside the door he stopped dead and never moved till the rehearsal was all over. Then he fired the conductor and gave Vestri the job. I guess Vestri was eighteen or nineteen then—he was five or six years older than Lena.

“He just went ahead and gave that kind of opera we all know about now, but they hadn't heard anything like him in Italy for years. Some people say they never had. I can't tell you anything you don't know about him as a musician,

except to remind you that Lena always said he was great because he played exactly what the composer wrote—no more, no less. I remember once—it was after Vestri had left the Metropolitan—a young twirp of a new conductor from Vienna was trying to show off and he told Lena to sing some passage different from the way she did. I was in at the rehearsal because I wanted to see her right afterward about some business. You ought to have seen her face when that guy told her what he wanted. She opened her mouth a couple of times, and then she said, ‘Excuse me, I think I sang it exactly as it is in the score.’ The guy told her never mind the score, he wanted it his way. Lena left her position and came down to the footlights and leaned over ’em. She had that dirty look on her face, with one eyebrow crooked. ‘Maybe you’re entitled to make cuts in this score,’ she said, ‘but what you leave of it I am going to sing exactly as Wagner wrote it. Or else I don’t sing.’

“But to get back to Vestri. He conducted in Italy for quite a while—ten or a dozen years, I guess—and nobody knew about him over here. Then Santino, the great baritone, was brought to the Met from the San Carlo in Naples, and the cards just fell so Santino got listened to when he said anything. He was a world-beater if I ever saw one. You remember him. Anyway he didn’t like this and he didn’t like that around the Met, and all the things he kicked about were real things, not just hogwash because somebody else got bigger billing or better parts. One day he was singing in a dress rehearsal of *Rigoletto* and the conductor got his goat. What conductor? Oh, I don’t remember, some Dago or other, he ran the whole Italian shebang there. Anyway he was rotten and he plumbered the orchestra in Santino’s big aria, you know, that *La rà La rà* thing. Santino was fit to be tied, he nearly burst a blood vessel. He shook his fists

and roared and called the conductor an assassin and a butcher and a shoemaker. One of the board of directors was in the house listening to the rehearsal and he called down out of his box and asked Santino if this was such a pig of a conductor, where did he know of a better one? Most people would be scared at this. But Santino probably thought he was going to be fired anyway, so he said, 'Signor, there is only one conductor alive who is fit to play Verdi and that is Guido Vestri at the San Carlo.' The upshot of it was that the next season Vestri was conducting at the Metropolitan.

"Well, for a while after she got to the Metropolitan herself, Lena didn't pay much attention to this guy Vestri. Oh hell, she knew he was good, she was no dope, but with that queer narrowness of hers she was really only interested in Mahler. He conducted her debut in *Don Giovanni*. It was maybe a month before she got to do an opera with Vestri, and naturally she was impressed right away quick. It was *Trovatore*. I was at the performance and boy!—do I remember that! One night up at her place Lena said she'd never known the old organ-grinder's opera was music until Vestri showed her. Everybody nodded, Mahler too. They all agreed that Vestri was the works for Italian music and especially for Verdi. Nobody said anything about him in German music because nobody knew he could do it. He sprang that the next year. But once he discovered Lena he had her in more and more of his casts. He used to follow her around with his eyes while she was on the stage, but he handled her musically just as rough as anybody in the orchestra. He'd bark out his orders once, and for Lena that was enough. He was the boss—she was scared to death of him, and the better she got to know him the more scared she was. Incidentally, he never sat down when he was conducting, not even in rehearsals. Once he said something about some other conductor to

Lena, and he beat his forehead and hissed, 'Sit down? How can a man sit down to conduct an opera?' He never used a score, either. Musicians say he knew every score a damn sight better than the guy that wrote it. That was how he could tell every God-damn thing that happened, down to the last super and second-string fiddler.

"Now you got to remember, Dave, we're still talking about Lena's first season at the Met, and a hell of a lot of things happened before Vestri got to be as important to her as he was later. I can see you're impatient for me to tell you everything I know about the two of 'em, but this ain't just the right time and place. We'll take all that up a little later, when we get around to where it fits in with what happened. In that first season at the opera Lena was working with both Vestri and Mahler. She was doing her usual stuff in two or three languages, but the public was so crazy about her in Italian parts that she sang more of them in her first season at the Met than she had in her whole career in Europe. Of course she sang German too, with Mahler, but that first year she was known mainly as an Italian singer. Pizzetti was fit to bust with pride over the way she'd turned out. And was she sweet to him! Nothing was too good for that old boy; he could have had her right hand if he'd asked for it. As a matter of fact he never asked for anything. She hated to be asked for things. She wanted to be generous in her own way, but if somebody expected something from her she could be as mean as Shylock.

"Whenever I got Lena off by herself I'd begin to prod her about concerts, and finally she asked Pizzetti what he thought about the idea and the old boy said he guessed she might as well try a couple. So she said she would, but only in two towns to start with. I chose Boston and Cleveland. When I suggested a Carnegie Hall recital that first year she abso-

lutely refused. She wanted a lot of appearances at the Met, which they would only guarantee her on an exclusive basis. So we couldn't book a concert until after the opera season was over. Besides that she wouldn't consider going in for concerts seriously until after she'd worked up some songs with Pizzetti and spent a summer studying Lieder with Lilli Lehmann to boot. Damn few artists care about their standards to that extent when somebody tells 'em they could sell out Carnegie Hall—though whether Lehmann could really teach Geyer anything is something I've never been able to decide in my own mind. I leave it to you educated guys.

"We finally took off for the Bean City in March—it was 1908, I guess—and Geyer had a grand program in spite of what she said she didn't know. I had tried to get her to sing one or two Wagner arias, but she said nix. I can still hear her say, 'The *Hallenaria*—with a piano?—are you crazy, Mr. Phillips?' I suppose I was. Anyway, the program began with a group of Handel and Bach. The second group was two arias—*Dove Sono* of Mozart, and the *Casta Diva* of Bellini. Then two groups of Lieder, and finally four Italian songs that Maestro picked out for her. They were all right—Tosti and Paladilhe—but I didn't think they suited her voice very well. The big idea came later, when she used to close her program with a group of folk-songs—Italian and Hungarian and Czech and Russian—and her audience would go raving crazy. There was always somebody in the house whose mother had sung him to sleep with one of those songs in the old country, and he would get up and start to yell and tell God to bless her, and then the fun would begin. But that was quite a while later.

"This trip to Boston was a humdinger. In the first place Geyer had never been in an American sleeping-car—she'd never been anywhere in this country except New York.

When we went into the car she took a look around and I thought she'd have a fit. Miss deHaven hadn't bothered to tell her what the train would be like. Of course I'd had the office reserve a drawing room for the two of 'em, but before Geyer got to that she walked through the car gaping at the berths like somebody at a side-show in the circus. Some chap was sitting on the edge of his berth taking off his pants behind the curtain and I guess he lost his balance or something because all of a sudden his bare legs shot out into the aisle right in front of Geyer and she let out a scream you could hear up in Westchester. You know what her lungs were—when she let go there was a noise. I damn near laughed out loud, but I pulled myself together and explained what it was all about. Then I showed her her drawing room and I must say the disgust on her face had me scared, I thought she'd turn round and walk off the train.

"It seems Geyer was used to pretty luxurious travelling in Europe, what with this duke and his servants and their way of doing things, and a plain green-plush drawing room looked kind of mean to her. The darkey came along about then and that gave her another shock. When he wanted to know if the beds'd been made right she shoved him out of the room and hollered for that God-damn maid who was standing out in the aisle like a wet alley cat. They had a lot of palaver in Czech—I didn't know what it was at the time, I thought it was some kind of special cuss words—and the maid dashed into the drawing room and slammed the door and locked it and that was the last I saw of 'em that night. I went out in the car and found Sam Rosenau, the accompanist I had hired on trial. He was looking kind of sunk.

" 'Say,' he said, 'is she that kind? Temperamental?'

" 'Listen,' I told him. 'She's not as temperamental as you

are. She's tired and lonely and bewildered and she never saw one of these outfits before and that nigger scared her half to death. She'll be all right.'

"We went and had a drink and went to bed. I told the porter not to go near her and I knocked on her door myself in the morning, and told her she had half an hour before we got to Boston. She called through the door and asked me what about breakfast, did they have that on American trains. I told her to wait till we got to the hotel. Somebody had tipped me off that she liked to eat, so I'd made her reservations at the Touraine, and no American hotel ever had better food. Thank God I didn't send Geyer to Detroit for her first American concert.

"Pretty soon she came out of the drawing room, spruce as a policeman, in a tailored suit with a pretty hat and one of those thin veils with spots in it. I asked her how she'd slept and she gave me a dirty look and said the less said about that the better. I put her and Miss deHaven and the maid in a cab and Sam and I followed with the bags in another, and in about half an hour she was all settled in her suite at the Touraine. She felt a lot better about American towns after she saw one of those old parlormaid's they used to have at the Touraine—they wore black silk aprons. 'Just like London,' Geyer said with a kind of funny expression, and I never knew whether she liked it or was kidding.

"I told her I'd see she got a good breakfast, and she told me all she wanted was coffee and rolls. I said all right, coffee and rolls. What she got was a big baked apple with thick cream, real New England fish balls with bacon, hot yeast rolls, buckwheat cakes with maple syrup, and a big pot of coffee. I came up from my own breakfast downstairs to see how she was making out and she was sitting with her feet stretched out in front of her like a man, staring at the empty

plates and licking a drop of maple syrup off the tip of her finger. 'Ah!' she said, 'Boston is a fine place. It is even worth that train ride, Mr. Phillips.'

"Life was always like that with her. People who knew her before I did told me she never raised much hell in Europe when she was travelling, but either they didn't know it when they saw it or she didn't have anything to kick about there. She raised plenty in the U. S. A. The trouble was mostly about the food but there were other things. But when you got everything fixed for her right she'd brighten up and you'd think maybe you were in heaven. That's the way she was that morning. I walked over and looked at all the empty dishes and said, 'Madame Geyer, would you like a piece of pie?'

" 'What?' she said.

" 'Pie,' I said. 'Apple or pumpkin or mince, whatever you like. They eat pie for breakfast in this town.'

" 'So do I,' she said, 'if it tastes like the rest of their cooking.' And so help me God, she ate a piece of pumpkin pie.

"It didn't take me long to discover that food was a better consolation for her when she was upset than anything else in the world. I don't understand why she never got fat. She was always a big woman, tall, with large bones, but she was never fat. And she ate more than two ordinary women. I will say, though, that she only ate one big meal in a day. After polishing off that Boston breakfast she dragged Miss deHaven out for a walk and they didn't show up till a quarter of three that afternoon. By that time I was so wild I'd called up the police and the New York office and everybody but the President in Washington. Geyer and deHaven showed up in a cab, both pretty disgruntled. It seemed they got lost. They went out and from what I gathered they walked halfway to Worcester before they thought about

turning back. By that time they were so lost they couldn't do anything about it, and couldn't find a cab—they were way off in the suburbs somewhere.

"Her concert was that night and she'd meant to lie down at two o'clock, sleep until four, and then lie around until time to get dressed. But this getting lost ruined all that. I was in a sweat. I was afraid she'd be in a state and get hysterics and say she couldn't sing, or throw a jar of cold cream at me—I don't know what. Not at all. She asked me to get her a glass of hot milk, and she drank it while she sat and went over details with Sam. Then she went into her bedroom to lie down and Miss deHaven told me to come back for them in time to have her at the hall half an hour before the concert. This seemed crazy to me—most artists show up just on the deadline, often a little later. But she said Geyer always liked to sit in her dressing room and think things over before singing. I went down to Symphony Hall and looked over the box office. It was fair. We'd advertised the concert well, but you know how it is in Boston, a woman'd have to be Melba before they'd ever heard of her unless she'd sung there. Besides it was tough to promote Geyer as a concert singer when she hadn't given a New York recital. But her press from her opera season was marvellous, and I used that in all the ads.

"She was ready when I called for her, and I'll never forget how wonderful she looked. She had on a white satin evening dress embroidered with pearls and a band of big ones in her hair—later I found out the tiara was real and they were some pearls! Must have been the duke. She told me she didn't know what to do about make-up—the whole idea was absolutely new to her, she didn't know whether there'd be footlights or anything. She didn't have any make-up on and I told her she'd better—about half as much as for the

opera, but no grease paint. You might think she'd be pretty sore at being told that when she was all dressed and set to go, but no, she put on a big white bathrobe over her dress and tied a towel under her chin like a bib and in ten minutes the job was all done. She was a magnificent-looking woman. I never saw a woman who wasn't beautiful who gave you such an impression that she was. She had a kind of glow about her, like a steady fire, and when she stood absolutely still and did nothing she radiated more vitality than a race horse. Of course when she went into action this force was irresistible.

"Her whole attitude toward that first concert was as if she was being cheated of something—no costume, no orchestra, no scenery, nothing. It made her nervous. When we got down to the hall she insisted on looking into the auditorium; the house was still empty and the sight of that big bare stage with nothing on it but a piano gave her the jitters. She went back in the greenroom and sat down on the edge of a chair and bit her lips. Nobody said anything. Sam pretended to be busy going over the music and little deHaven just stood in a corner watching Geyer out of the tail of her eye. The maid was scowling and muttering to herself. I found out later she thought it was an insult to Geyer to have her sing that way—how could a great opera singer look like anything in an ordinary dress, singing in a bare barn like that? I kept looking at my watch and cursing Geyer for getting there so early—what was there to do except get nervous? After a while the house started filling up and I told Geyer she could go on in ten minutes. She hadn't said a word all this time but all of a sudden she looked up at me and grinned and whispered, 'This is a hell of an idea.'

"You could have knocked me flat. I asked where she ever heard such language and she whispered back, 'You'd be sur-

prised.' I guess I would, too. The most peculiar thing about that woman was that she went through so many different phases in her life and really became part of each one, then when the next came along you thought she'd dropped all the others and after a while you found out you were mistaken. She could put on the Paris grande dame like a flash if she wanted to and you ought to have seen her do it in Sioux City, Iowa. Pretty soon I told her five minutes, so she motioned to the maid and the woman broke an egg into a little glass and filled it up with sherry. Geyer killed the whole works in one gulp. Then she stood up and threw back her shoulders and let out a scale that made my scalp tingle. It was time to go on, and just as the man opened the door, deHaven darted forward and kissed Geyer's hand. I thought that was pretty steep. I'd never seen that kind of thing before but I guess you can get used to anything in this world.

"Geyer was nervous because she missed all the support of the orchestra and the opera paraphernalia. Of course she had sung concerts before, in those palaces in Europe, but they were always in a big ballroom or something and she really never had sung in a plain concert hall. It was a brilliant idea of hers to put the Handel first. She always had good ideas for programs, and that was one of them, because it was in English and that got the Boston audience right from the start. She sang *O Sleep, Why Dost Thou Love Me?* and *Come Beloved*. When I heard her English diction I wanted to yell with delight, it was so beautiful, so clear and cultivated. It wasn't English English, either, it was American, but the polished kind.

"Believe it or not, the Boston concert was a real success—I mean we got some kick out of the audience, the way you might in New York or Chicago. They had a wonderful time.

They're awful snobs up there, and they got this idea they were in on something before anybody else was, so they were being gracious about it. But what interested me a lot more was the way Lena warmed up to it. She burned 'em up with her two arias—you could take that for granted—though she hated singing them with a piano. After that, though, she got to the Schubert and began with *Du bist die Ruh'*. I guess she didn't know herself how she was doing it, but she got it over with this queer mixture of guts and holiness that she used to have in her German stuff. Gee, she was wonderful. She was just the opposite from the way she sang opera. In the Met she used to breeze out on that stage and open up and blow the whole works sky high and keep it there. In a concert, even in that first one, she just stood there kind of quiet and took the whole damn audience right into her arms—only she did even more, she made each person in the place feel as if she was singing just to him. You remember people's faces at Lena's concerts—lots of times they'd look at her as if they were seeing angels or something. She got onto this right away in Boston—I mean she saw she could do it—and I think it made a difference in her—personally and as a musician."

Chapter Seventeen

"GEYER liked to think of herself as an American," George said, "and in the end she got to be a real one. But it didn't happen all at once. You couldn't expect miracles, and even in spite of the fact that she'd been here when she was a girl studying under Pizzetti, her career in Europe had steered her 'way down another track. DeHaven wasn't exactly what you'd call an Americanizing influence, either; those stuffy old New York families are about as typical of America as I am of the Zulus. For years, being an American was just one of Lena's ideas—there was no reality to it at all and when she rubbed up against the real article she damn near went crazy. I mean, she would make me talk by the hour about Denver, or Sioux City, or Spokane, but when she actually got to those places she thought they were terrible. It was the same way with people. She'd love to hear me describe the characters I've met knocking around but when she was faced with them she couldn't really understand them at all. The idea of mixing with 'em never entered her head, and when we were on tour she spent most of her time in her hotel suite and didn't receive anybody. If you were to ask me to sum up her life in America in a few words I'd say that it consisted chiefly of closing up this big gap between what she thought she liked and what she really did like.

"For instance, there was all that business about her citizenship—you've got the dope on that I know, but just let me remind you that the original idea of getting naturalized didn't come from Lena at all, but from Dora, the Bohunk.

She was a funny woman, that maid, and a tough nut. She learned to speak a mugwump English, all in single syllables. Sometimes I'd catch her listening kind of carefully to me with her damn frown, and then she'd turn away muttering to herself. I told Lena she'd better watch out, because while I was doing my best to control my language all the time, it wasn't anything for a Bohunk like Dora to toy with. Dora said lots of words she didn't know the meaning of. One day I told Lena that she had to see some man on business whom we both hated, and when Dora ushered him in she said, 'Meesth' Sthevens, de sonofabeetch.'

"Dora had a queer kind of intimacy with Lena that nobody else ever had. I guess it came from the fact that they were both peasants. They met back in 1900 when Lena was making some guest appearances in Leipzig and was staying at a small hotel there. Dora was the chambermaid, and one afternoon when Lena was returning from a rehearsal she found her in the hall trying to move some big piece of furniture. She was skinny as a rail, and raddled with hard work, and just as Lena came along she gave a groan, dropped the cabinet she was trying to lift, and collapsed. Lena dragged her into her own room, revived her, fed her, and got her story out of her. It seemed that she'd been working on an estate in Bohemia where her master knocked her up, and before the kid was born shipped her off on a train to Prague. The train went on to Leipzig while Dora was asleep, and when she woke up there she was. It didn't make much difference because she didn't know anybody in either place, but of course the kid came and she ended up in a public hospital. The kid was turned over to the foundling hospital and she never saw it again. Six days after she'd had it they kicked her out on the street because she wasn't a German citizen.

"Lena got wrought up something fierce about this—she

was even wrought up when she told me about it. At the time she took steps to get Dora's health back. She hired her a room in a boarding-house and got a doctor and tried to trace the kid. Later, when Dora had got her strength back, she joined Lena in Berlin and insisted she was Lena's servant for life. Lena was poor in those days and a personal maid no more entered her scheme of things than a yacht, but Dora insisted she'd work for nothing if Lena would just feed her. And of course Lena gave in. Dora's wages at first were almost nothing, but they got bigger and bigger, and by the end of twenty years she was getting a salary all out of proportion to her job. She used to spend most of it trying to trace her lost son, but she never found him.

"Well, to get back to what I was saying, Dora's idea of America was much more realistic than Lena's. Of course she'd come here in the lap of luxury, and you ought to have seen her bossing the Plaza bellhops around, but just the same she was shrewd and observant and she could see the other side of things too. When she was travelling with Lena she often ran into somebody like herself who hadn't had it so soft, a railroad conductor in Montana, or a plumber in a Pittsburgh hotel, or waiters in Chicago or Duluth or Lincoln. They told her she had it easy, riding around the country in Pullman cars with a prima donna. It wasn't all such a cinch. Maybe some day she'd be up against it like they had been. Or maybe she'd get taken back to Europe on one of these summer trips and get left there. Anyhow, whatever they told her, she suddenly came to Lena one day and said she'd like to become an American citizen.

"Lena was surprised—and that's just my point. With all this story-book devotion to America that she'd managed to work up she'd never thought about it in a real way. Maybe she knew who the President was, but I doubt like hell if she

knew anything about the government. She just took it for granted that she was American and that everything was dandy. All of a sudden she saw there was a lot more reason for her to take out papers than for Dora to do it. I took them down to get their first papers myself, and by God I wish you could have seen that sight—two hulking peasant women with big bones and hands, one in silks and furs, the other in plain black serge, both of 'em born in hovels somewhere in a God-forsaken country. Jeez, in those days it didn't even have a name. Lena was pleased when the papers were handed to her—she just glowed with pride. She got her final papers and became a citizen five years later, in 1915.

"Of course in the end she got to know America better than most people know it, but it was a tough struggle. Twenty years ago you didn't find Frigidaires and fancy dietetics and pedigreed plumbing around this country the way you do now. When you went on tour you took your stomach right in your hands and consigned it to God. There was cold storage instead of refrigerated fast freight, and cold storage meant meat embalmed anywhere upwards of three months. Lena was a hellion about her food. She was cranky and finicky and sometimes I wanted to tell her to go back to Europe and sit on it. She never would touch anything that was canned or cold storage or fried. Well, you can see how much she got to eat in any town smaller than Chicago or San Francisco or New Orleans. After she got over being so suspicious of me, I booked her for a tour of about twenty to twenty-five concerts each fall and spring, up to the time she went haywire about opera in 1911. On those tours she'd be in dozens of places like Wade, Arkansas, or Missoula, Montana, and she swore that barring the South, there was nothing fit to eat between New York and the Pacific Coast. Jesus, how she raved. She said if the stuff had been

fit for human consumption to begin with, the cooking was certain to poison you anyhow.

"Then she had such a collection of trained seals on these tours. There was Miss deHaven, God only knows why, but Lena wouldn't travel to South Orange without her. There was Dora. There was Sam Rosenau—he was a beautiful musician and he needed to be to take the curse off the things she said about singing with piano. Then there was Joe Leshky the piano tuner, and me if I could spare the time, otherwise one of the boys from the office to hold all the pieces together.

"The first long tour Lena nearly went crazy from boredom, and of course drove me crazy too. She'd sit in the train, day after day, looking for somebody to bawl hell out of. She couldn't sew or knit and it made her nervous if Miss deHaven did. The two of 'em used to play cribbage with a little pocket-size board that she carried in a handbag. The minute I got 'em planted in their drawing room that board would come out of Lena's bag and she'd shove it under Miss deHaven's nose, whether the little girl wanted to play or not. One night we got on a train in Peoria after the concert and Lena was all keyed up and didn't want to go to sleep. So she hauled out the cribbage. Miss deHaven had a headache and begged off, but she asked me if I wouldn't play with Lena. I'd never played cribbage in my life, and I was stumped, but I got a bright idea and asked her if she wouldn't rather play pinochle. She'd never heard of pinochle, but she was willing to learn, so I went out in the car and got Sam and we taught her. In an hour she was cleaning us both out.

"After that she had to play pinochle every day. She made Miss deHaven learn. Whenever I was along the three of us would sit all day in the train, playing pinochle till my head spun. When I wasn't on tour Lena made Sam play. It was

quite a picture: the world-famous prima donna in an old woolen bathrobe, with her hair in two pigtails down her back; Miss deHaven looking like the principal of a young ladies' school; and Sam Rosenau who looked more like Groucho Marx than anyone else I can think of. They had a whole vocabulary of words and jokes of their own and the names they had for the typical situations and objects in a day's tour were lusus. Everything hung on the food. Lena seldom went into the dining car, but would have her food brought to her drawing room. When she rang for the darkey and he'd come with his menu, she'd say, 'Is this spinach canned, waiter?' The nigger always answered 'No *Ma'm*, dis real fresh spinach, real fresh.' Lena would order it and as soon as the birdbath came she'd sniff it. Then her eyes would narrow and her face freeze up and she'd ring for the darkey again.

"'Waiter,' she'd say, 'did you tell me this was fresh spinach?'

"Her expression would scare the damn dinge out of his wits but he'd say, 'Yas ma'm, dat right fresh spinach.'

"'Right fresh out of the can,' Lena would say, and the waiter would get his spinach back. 'Go and ask if there is any *fresh spinach*,' Lena would tell him. 'Fresh. Not canned. Or is there any vegetable on board this train that's not canned?'

"The waiter would come back after a while and allow they had fresh peas. 'Canned fresh peas?' Lena would ask, glaring at him. 'Well—' Then Lena would blow up and shake her fist in the nigger's face. 'Is there anything green to eat on this train that never saw a can?' she'd yell at him. He'd go and see. After a while he'd come back and say they had lettuce with French or may'naise dressin'. '*Pfui Deibel!*' Lena would say. 'All right, bring me your damned lettuce,

but no dressing. Just plain olive oil in a bottle.' After a while the food would come and a cruet of thin yellow oil alongside Lena's lettuce. She'd smell the bottle and rear up for more trouble. 'Waiter!' she'd yell, 'I said olive oil. This is cottonseed oil—maybe sewing-machine oil. Go and bring me some olive oil.'

"The damn darkey would be gone twenty minutes and after Lena had rung ten times the dining-car steward would appear, very sorry that that was all the oil they had. If he got out without some of the oil in his hair he was lucky. Finally Lena added olive oil to the tool kit, as she called the bag in which she carried her emergency rations.

"Then there was this business of eggs—you could never get a fresh egg in the United States, even in a town surrounded with a hundred square miles of farms. The more the farms, Lena said, the rottener the eggs. Getting fresh eggs was the main object of her existence when she was on tour. She needed them to swallow just before she went on to sing and if the egg was an hour older than twenty-four Lena knew it. The first thing when they got to a town, Sam Rosenau would have to go out to the highest-class market in the place and ask for one fresh egg. He'd break it and smell. Sam's nose, by the time Lena got through training it, was better than a bloodhound's. If the egg passed muster he'd buy half a dozen—two for her breakfast, one for the concert, a couple to allow for breakage and one for insurance for the next concert in case the eggs in the following town were worse than these.

"Packing eggs is the next nastiest thing to walking on 'em. The tool kit was all right, it had a couple of pockets where Dora used to put eggs, but once the tool kit got sent ahead with the trunks, and Dora had a fit trying to keep Lena from finding out about it. She staved off the olive-

oil question and the bran-biscuit question and the coffee question (Lena always carried her own coffee). But Dora couldn't do much about the egg question. She had to pack the damn things somewhere.

"We were in Salina, Kansas—Jesus, what a hole. We were all on the same floor in the hotel, in fact I guess that was the only floor there was, and Lena had about half of it for herself and deHaven and Dora. Well, anyway, I was dressing for the concert when I heard an uproar that made my blood freeze. Sounded like an elephant with a hang-over. I ran down the hall in my pants and undershirt and burst into Lena's room. There she was in the middle of the floor in her lace corset-cover and drawers, holding up the white satin dress she was about to put on and screaming at Dora in Czech. I grabbed her and told her to shut up, did she want to ruin her voice before the concert? 'Ruin my voice!' she snorted. 'There won't be any concert.'

" 'Why not?'

"She turned around, holding the dress spread out in front of her. Right on the seat of it was a great big splotch of what had been fresh egg—only Dora hadn't helped matters any by trying to clean it. In fact, the whole place stank to heaven of Carbona. 'This jackass,' Lena hissed, shaking her fist at Dora, 'packed an egg on the seat of my only dress.' (This was a one-night stop and we'd sent all the heavy luggage ahead to Denver). 'So go and cancel the concert.'

" 'I can't, Lena,' I said. 'The whole main drag is full of buggies and Fords; they've been driving in from fifty miles around all day. Half the farmers in Kansas are here. You can't cancel the concert and disappoint the poor devils now.'

"If Lena had been in a big city she might really have refused to sing, but she knew what these Western farm audiences were and she didn't want to disappoint them. It

wasn't so hard to get her to say she'd sing, but she had nothing to wear. We phoned the manager's wife and she rounded up the decentest evening dresses in the town—there were only four of 'em—but Lena couldn't have worn one to a dogfight. Time came to leave for the hall and Lena was still standing in the middle of the room in her underwear raising hell with Dora. I told Miss deHaven we had to get going even if Lena sang in a bathrobe. She came over and took the dress and said quietly, 'Here Lena, put it on,' just as if she was talking to a kid. 'And be quiet, too,' she said.

"Lena looked at her for a minute, keeping her mouth open to go on talking. But there was a mean look in deHaven's eye and Lena turned as meek as a calf. She held up her arms to have the dress put over her head. 'How am I going to sing?' she asked. 'Sitting down?' 'Certainly not,' deHaven said, 'you'll stand up by the piano and pretend you're starting a new vogue in concert deportment. You're not going to turn your back on your audience when you leave the stage. You'll back out. Pretend you're at court.'

"I'll never forget Lena at that concert. At first she was laughing so hard she could barely sing. The two of us, deHaven and I, would wait by the greenroom door and when Lena came backing through it we'd be right there behind her with nice refined remarks. Every time she backed out we'd all explode and laugh till we cried.

"The whole thing set Lena off in some way or other and she sang like something possessed. It was a miserable little town with a rickety, draughty 'opery house,' the only theatre in it, and that barn was crammed to the roof. Lena was as simple and as natural as a child, and they went wild about her. It's one thing to hear a knowing audience in a sophisticated city make an ovation, but when you get a couple of thousand rubes doing it, you've got something. After the

concert the mayor and his wife and all the town swells came back to the greenroom and Lena was as sweet to them as if they were the most important people she'd ever met. They hung around and gaped at her and I could see she was getting impatient and wanting to leave. I tipped her the high sign and she tipped me back with her thumb over her shoulder at the seat of her dress. I shrugged. Lena turned to the ladies who were gushing over her and said, 'You know I must explain why I tried that new idea of never turning my back this evening.'

"'Oh,' one woman cried, 'was there some special reason for it? We thought it was so nice and friendly of you.'

"'I'm glad you liked it,' Lena said, 'but I was having a little trouble. You see, we had an accident with an egg.' She turned around, holding out her arms like a ballet dancer and the women nearly died when they saw the seat of her dress. 'Why, you poor thing!' one of them crooned, 'what a shame to ruin that beautiful white satin. Why, honey, I could have got the egg off that silk before it dried.'

"The story spread all through the town and the next year when it came time to make Lena's bookings the manager in Salina wrote me they had to have Lena Geyer, nobody else would do. So Lena went there again. When the train pulled into the station she saw such a mob on the platform that she thought there must be a convention going on. There was—the whole town had turned out to meet her. They had the fire department band, and when she stepped off the train the mayor shook hands with her and said they were honored to tender her an official reception. He put her in a big open car and the parade started up Main Street to the hotel, with the band oom-pahing to beat hell. Across Main Street from one tree to another they had a big banner strung, like an election banner, with 'Welcome Lena Geyer' in letters three feet

high. When Lena told me about it after she got back to New York she said, 'It was in awful taste, but it was the most beautiful thing that ever happened to me. My God, George, I love America!' There were tears in her eyes.

"Another time Lena had an experience in Canton, Ohio, over a chicken. I wasn't along on that trip but believe me I heard plenty about it. It was toward the end of the tour and Lena was tired and cranky. She'd been living on boiled eggs and toast and baked potatoes and apples. There was just nothing she could eat in most of the towns she went to. The meat was all cold storage, and fried to boot; if she tried to get a plain broiled steak or chops they'd be fried no matter what orders she gave—fried in stale grease, too, and tough. What passed for vegetables were pale poison-green rags swimming in the slops they'd been canned in. Soup of course was out; Lena didn't think a meal fit to eat that didn't begin with soup, but she couldn't take the dishwater they served her on the road. She used to make us gag telling us about the garbage she found in hotels and trains. When she was getting near New York at the end of a tour she'd begin peppering me with telegrams like these:

GALLON OF PUREE MONGOLE WHOLE ROAST CAPON FIVE
RAW FRESH VEGETABLES BOTTLE CLOS VOUGEOT PLEASE HAVE
ON PLATFORM WHEN TRAIN ARRIVES LENA

MAKE NO ENGAGEMENTS FIRST TEN DAYS WILL BE BUSY
EATING LENA

HAVE LOST THIRTY POUNDS ON YOUR FILTHY TOUR
LENA

"This chicken episode was typical. As I said, Lena was at the end of a long tour and she was tired and half sick, trying to fight off a cold. They got to Canton on a sleeper in the

morning and Lena had some hot milk and toast for breakfast and went to sleep. At lunch time she wanted a good meal and Sam and Miss deHaven between them tried to see what they could do. They fine-combed the menu to find fresh things, and went to the chef to tell him how Lena wanted them cooked—simple, and nothing fried. Lunch came upstairs to her sitting room and she was hungry. She took one mouthful of the soup and without saying a word picked up the plate, walked into the bathroom, poured it down the toilet, flushed it, and came back and sat down. She lifted the cover off the platter and there was what was supposed to be a broiled spring chicken. Lena went far enough to taste it but she gagged on it and spit it out. It was not only barrelled, it was rank; and it had been cooked in rancid grease. There was a baked potato on her plate; Lena broke it open and the whole inside of it was black. She got up and threw it out of the window. She was resigned to eating bread and butter for lunch, and then she found the butter stank. So she had two pieces of dry bread and a cup of tea and went in to lie down for her nap. In a minute she came back in the sitting room to Sam and Miss deHaven. Sam said her face was white with rage and she was crying.

“‘I’m hungry,’ she said, ‘and if there isn’t something fit for me to eat after the concert tonight I’m going back to New York and never set foot in one of these God-forsaken holes again. Sam, will you go and get me a fresh-killed chicken? I don’t give a damn where you go for it, but you’ve got to see it running, with your own eyes, before it’s killed.’ She went into her bedroom and slammed the door.

“Sam was stumped. He knew Lena meant every word she said and if he was to see a chicken actually running he would have to get out of the town to where there were some farms. It was nearly three o’clock and he had to be back in plenty of

time for the concert. He got into a taxi and told the driver to keep driving until they came to a farm where there were chickens. They drove half an hour and passed lots of farms without any chickens but after a while they were way out in the country and Sam saw a farmhouse with chickens running around the front yard. He told the driver to stop. The meter was around four dollars then. He got out and told the farmer's wife he wanted to buy a chicken and have her dress it for him right away. 'All right,' she said, 'that'll cost forty cents. Thirty for the chicken and ten for the trouble.'

"Sam waited while she killed and plucked the chicken, with the taxi charging waiting time, and then she wrapped it up in a newspaper for him and he went back to the hotel in Canton. The taxi cost over nine dollars. He took the chicken upstairs. Lena had just got up from her nap. She was tickled to death with him and said she wouldn't have cared if the taxi had cost twenty-five dollars—but Sam suddenly realized they had to get the chicken cooked. He was going to take it down to the hotel chef, but Lena stopped him. 'He'll ruin it!' she said. 'He'll cook it in the same stinking axle grease that he's cooked everything else in for the past five years. Can't you find some decent honest soul who can roast or broil that chicken so I can eat it?'

"This was a tall order. Compared with driving out to the country to chase after a live chicken, finding a good plain cook in Canton, Ohio, was a poser. Sam told Lena it was impossible. She was feeling pretty low and was standing by the window looking out. Suddenly she clutched Sam and pointed at a building across the street. 'Look!' she cried. 'The Y. M. C. A.! They eat there, don't they? I bet they have a cook who's a God-fearing Christian and could cook my chicken without spoiling it. Go and see.'

"So Sam went across the street and asked for the Y. M. C. A. chef and told him the story. The cook was a nice young German and when he heard about Lena Geyer slowly starving to death he nearly cried. He took the chicken and told Sam not to worry any more. When Lena came back from the concert, there was her chicken beautifully broiled, waiting for her, and she fell on it without stopping to take off her wrap. She ate the whole thing in her fingers, like a savage, and even some of the bones, Sam said. It was her first meal in three days.

"The next year Lena sang in Canton and she had a big success. Before the intermission the ushers brought in a lot of flowers. One of them was carrying a white corsage box, all tied up with ribbon. Lena took the flowers and put them on the piano, and opened the corsage box, expecting to find orchids inside that she would pin on her dress. She plunged her hand in while bowing and smiling to the audience and pulled out a beautifully roasted golden-brown chicken. The whole house started to roar before Lena could get the chicken back in the box. For a minute she was pretty sore, because she thought somebody had played a fresh practical joke on her, but when she got in the greenroom she read the card in the chicken box. It was from the Y. M. C. A. chef and said, 'Dear Madame Geyer, I have raised this chicken from the egg especially for you, and have fed it on milk and corn meal mush. I hope it is pleasing to you. From your sincere admirer, H. Harbach.'

"That was the way it went for three years. Lena made big money and I was happy as a cricket because I was not only doing a good business but I had a warm personal friendship with the greatest personality I had ever known in my life. All things considered we got along pretty good—the opera

was the only thing that stood between us. I'd remind her every time I went to her apartment at ten in the morning and find her tired in bed after singing a *Fidelio* or something, that she'd been paid less than half of one concert fee for it, and wasn't that nice! She'd give me a dirty look and say 'You *Schlemiel*, you can't appreciate opera. All you understand is box office.' Then she'd grin at me and tell Dora to get me a drink. But if I started talking to her about some concert date or other, who was it that tried to raise the ante and jack up the guarantee? Lena, of course. She was the queerest combination of shrewdness and childishness I ever saw. When the Victor Talking Machine Company approached me to have her make records for them, I thought she wouldn't even listen to the idea, being so wrapped up in opera. Not on your life. She was thrilled. She'd heard Caruso say something about his record royalties and she saw this was the way to make dough without dragging herself all over the country.

"'Wonderful,' she cried. 'I won't have to sing any more concerts at all. I can just sit home and rake in the royalties.'

"This made me a little sore, so I reminded her maybe she'd be lousy on the phonograph. Some voices didn't record as well as others and you couldn't predict what the public would take to anyway. 'They'll take to me,' she said, proud just like a kid.

"'Don't be too sure,' I said.

"And by golly, I was right. Lena's voice didn't record well. I think now with all these electrical devices it would be wonderful, but her voice was the wrong size or quality or something for those old machines. The records were beautifully sung, if you hadn't known who made them you'd think them very nice. But Lena Geyer just didn't come out of the old horn. I heard the records before she

did and I was sick. I asked the people if there was anything the matter with the technical work and they swore there wasn't; they'd done their best with them. Naturally they were just as anxious for them to be good as I was. Records did the concert business a lot of good in those days; people flocked to hear their favorite artists after they learned to know 'em from records. And vice versa.

"I was scared to tell Lena about this after it happened—she hadn't been able to go along to hear the records in the Victor offices because she had a rehearsal at the opera. I met her at the Plaza afterward. One look at my face was enough for her. 'They're bad,' she said.

" 'Not so good,' I said. It takes a lot of courage to say a thing like that to a prima donna. Managers have been beaten up for less.

"She was pretty cut up about it, and the funny thing was she didn't question my judgment. I would have expected her to tell me I was a jackass and rush off to hear the records herself. She did nothing of the sort. She sat down slowly, taking off her gloves, and pushing her hat on the back of her head. She looked like a kid in school that forgot its lines in the middle of the recitation. Terribly ashamed. I felt just like hell about it. I told her maybe my opinion wasn't worth a damn, and she ought not to feel bad till she'd heard the records herself and maybe she'd think they were good. And I added that they *were* good—in a way.

"She looked up at me with those big green eyes, and her face just as open as a book. Somehow, though I knew her pretty well and believed in her, she had never struck me as a woman until that minute. She had always been so big and sweeping and supreme. This time she looked at me and said, 'George, if you don't think those records good for any reason, then they're no good. I'd take your word over any-

body's.' I was awfully moved by that. Hell, she was as natural and honest as an old shoe.

"When she heard the records she agreed with me completely. She was disgusted. The only trouble I had with her was convincing her that her voice didn't really sound the way it did on the records. For a minute she didn't believe me. 'I bet I've been singing like the cow in that box for ten years, and nobody has had the nerve to tell me!' she said. She was soon cured of that idea, but she refused under any circumstances to have her records go on sale. This caused a lot of comment. People would ask her about it and at first I expected her to have some lie ready to answer them with. But she came right out with the truth. 'I don't record well,' she'd answer, 'so you'll have to put up with me in the flesh.' I knew this wasn't easy for her and I admired her for it. All this sort of thing was so different from my first impressions of her when I thought of her as a pompous European opera singer loaded with jewels from a French duke. Nothing could have described her worse. She wore the jewels like so much glass, and she lost her little European mannerisms, one by one. My clearest personal memory of Lena in those days is the way she and I used to sit up in her sitting room in little tank towns after the concert, eating ham sandwiches and drinking beer (unless we were in a dry state, and then you should have heard her cracks) and talking about everything under the sun. She used to love to hear about the things we did on the farm in Massachusetts when I was a boy—haymaking and cornhusking and syrup making and sausage season and all the other stuff. Hell, I hadn't thought of it in years. But she'd see these farms out of train windows and then save up all her questions about them to ask me.

"Well, as I said a while back, things were pretty nice the first three years. Lena worked awful hard, and when you

come right down to it, why shouldn't she? She was really a great big husky Bohunk, she didn't use up any energy anywhere else, and all she did was sing and take care of herself. She was just as good the last day of a season as the first, because she was smart and never let anybody overwork her. But what used to surprise me was the way she had even more pep, in those days, to put into some terrific uncut Wagner opera for Vestri than into a nice easy concert for me. Didn't take me so long to figure out that there was more to this than dear old Dick Wagner. Lena got a lot of this voltage from that little Dago in the pit, and why not?—if he sent the audience into a frenzy what do you think he did to the singers?

"He loaded new parts on her, and had her in his casts as often as she would sing. She wouldn't sing even for him oftener than twice a week, though—she had too much sense for that. But when she did sing—every single performance right on the nail, every note so God-damn perfect it used to crucify us. Why should I bother to remind you about that, you know it better than me. But I can't forget how those performances *looked*, Dave—not only the way they sounded. Lena up there on the stage like a hot-blooded Venus de Milo, and Vestri down there in the pit, electricity just snapping out of him, and everybody scared to death, all the singers and orchestra. Remember his face when the light from the desk struck up on it in the dark pit?—Jeez, he looked like a cross between Christ and the devil. He was like a match that set fire to the whole works the minute he'd snap his baton and start the overture. Every opera the same, it didn't matter whether it was Verdi or Wagner or one of those old Gluck things you couldn't have dragged me to except for Lena and him.

"By this time it was along in the spring of 1911 and Vestri

had made a pretty big dent on Lena, musically if no other way. He told her she was to learn Isolde for the next season. The minute she said that to me on the phone at three A.M. in the morning, I knew the jig was up. The next day when I went around to talk to her at her place she told me right off not to make any more concert engagements for her. At first I was pretty sore and asked her what was the idea. She told me she didn't know, only that she was so absorbed in her work at the opera that she couldn't be bothered with any more concerts. I kept asking her for what time, and for how long, and finally she got peeved herself and snapped 'I don't know. Maybe forever.'

"I felt Vestri all through this and I couldn't get away from the idea. It got my goat. So I told her I thought that. She was wild. She never lost her temper with me before or since, but I certainly set off a bombshell that time. I thought she'd hit me with something. I didn't need half an eye to realize I'd stirred up something she was damn sensitive about and something she was keeping very tight to herself. I realized that whether or not I'd really said anything terrible, I had to calm her down. I was already so fond of her as a friend that if she'd told me she'd never sing another concert in her life I would still have wanted to keep her friendship. So I asked her to be still a minute while I explained what was worrying me. I told her I was worried because she'd be burning herself up at the rate and intensity Vestri expected her to work. She'd kill herself if she wasn't careful.

"She came over and sat down close to me on the couch. 'Look here, George,' she said. 'You know I like you. I'm grateful to you, and I trust you. You're a person I respect. But you must understand that I'd rather burn myself up for Vestri for nothing than sing ditties to yokels for all the money in the world. This isn't a question of career or money

or anything, George. It's my life, it's art, the one thing I've given up everything on earth for. Mark my words, there will never be an opera conductor like Vestri again. You don't understand what a privilege it is to work with him. I don't know how long that will go on—but as long as I am working for him he gets first claim. The reason I can't sing concerts is not only because I won't have strength enough after taking on this Isolde, but they don't make enough sense, George. They're like mosquitoes buzzing around bothering me when I've got something bigger on my mind. They made me nervous this year, and they'd be much worse next. Be an angel and help me now. Some day, when the time comes, I'll help you. Yes?

"There was nothing else I could say. We shook hands and she kissed me and made me promise I'd stick around and not go back on her while she wasn't singing for me. I was to go on handling all her business details just the same. I felt pretty sore at the woman, but God damn it, I loved her and I like anybody who knows what he wants and goes for it. So I said, 'Good luck, you big Bohunk,' and we kissed again and had a drink on it."

Chapter Eighteen

OPERA had indeed completely captivated Lena Geyer, and it dominated her artistic and personal life. She had been willing to try a few concert tours, but against the money she made from them was pitted the vast emotional and imaginative influence of the opera. She found herself at the Metropolitan on the rising sweep of its greatest years, when every factor—conductors, artists, repertoire, direction—contributed to the powerful inspiration that she drew from dramatic singing. And she herself made the greatest of contributions to that era. Also she felt nothing static about opera. It was a growing force. She had arrived at the Metropolitan to find her beloved Mahler ready to carry on with her where they had left off in Vienna; she found extraordinary voices with which to sing; and she began at once to feel a sense of expansion beyond her previous very wide scope. Then she found Guido Vestri, and he was a musical inspiration and a personal influence even stronger than Mahler. Her nature was big enough to contain all these wide and vital forces, and she released herself to them utterly. The music we heard in consequence has become fabulous.

It is all too easy to be sentimental about the Metropolitan when I think back to those days. I am tired of hearing about its obsolescence, its dust and dirt, its antiquated equipment, its musty smells, its lack of space, the shallow stage, the inadequate dressing rooms, and the abundance of awful seats put there because the box holders of the gilded eighties thought of nobody but themselves when they built the place.

Nevertheless, when a new opera house is opened somewhere else in New York it can never mean to me and thousands of others what the Metropolitan does. In those wonderful old days I used to climb to the balcony clinging to my mother's hand, puffing painfully before I reached my destination because my legs were so short and the stairs so long. Then there was all the business of falling over blocks and steps once we got into the balcony, and finally of clambering into our seats in a rain of programs, gloves, opera glasses, my cap, my muffler, my mother's sealskin muff, and her big crocodile-skin pocketbook. We always had so many things to carry!

Then I would sit and crane my neck while I gazed at everything in the house. I doubt if there is a variation of shading in the red plush upholstery that I don't know, or a streak in the tawny curtains, or a curlycue on the proscenium arch. Some of the ornamental design on the ceiling and the gilt framing of the stage looked to me like the crisscross baked into Nabisco wafers, of which I was very fond. Over and over I read the magic names on the arch: Gluck, Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Gounod, Beethoven; and I did not feel my life was complete until I had heard at least one opera by each of the mystic six. Insistently I used to ask Mother why Puccini wasn't there and in vain did she try to explain that the house was built long before Puccini became classic. Mother used to let me keep the opera glasses most of the time, and before the lights went down I amused myself by training them slowly all over the house. When the bells in the corridors rang, my spine would begin to tingle and I would sit up straight in my chair, with my hands poised ready to be the first to applaud when the conductor came in. Grandfather told me that many people do not give an opera conductor his due, and that if I enjoyed the opera I should

realize how much was owed him. I did not need to be reminded much further of his significance, for during my childhood we had Vestri!

It is curious how those operas of my early years stand out as if they were burned into my memory, while much music of more recent hearing has faded into a blur. As if it were yesterday I remember every moment and every emotion of each opera in which I heard Lena Geyer, and I also remember in that way every performance conducted by Vestri. I can still recall my real terror in the second act of *Orfeo*, where I felt as if I were really in Hades, pursued by that pack of gruesome, deformed demons, in whom nobody could recognize the steady old Metropolitan chorus, trained by the master. To this day I can hear their roars of "No!" and I remember the nightmare I had the night afterward, when I awoke screaming and begging them not to drag me down to Hell. No wonder I am not alone in my memory of that opera, for a breathless little boy was only one of the many who heard an incomparable cast—Homer as Orfeo, Geyer as Eurydice, and Gluck as the Happy Shade. I wept with joy when the scene changed from Hell to the Elysian Fields and Alma Gluck sat there at her harp, singing the divinely beautiful aria. Eurydice was not a thrilling part for Geyer—"Who wants to play a stupid corpse?" she asked Pizzetti—but she sang all classical music so incomparably that nobody else could have met Vestri's standard as well.

It was as Armide that she had a chance to dramatize and vitalize the music of Gluck, and she made the most of it. She was the embodiment of regal grandeur and tragedy. She put the same quality into her *Norma*, which was never heard at the Metropolitan, but which I know, musically, from the countless times I have heard her sing the score. Yet Armide had a sinister side, and when Geyer summoned Hate to assist

her in her wicked sorceries, she made my blood run cold. My grandfather used to read me the stories of all these operas from a big book he had, and I was usually able to follow the plot during the performance without any difficulty.

Since I have nobody closer to Lena Geyer than myself on whom to draw for the essence of her work at the Metropolitan, I feel safe in relying on my own memories, for they are clear as glass to this day. At first she was just a voice to me, a distant miracle that transported me to wherever she was singing. I was about nine then. Gradually, though perhaps precociously, I grew in understanding of opera and music, until, when I was still a child, a boy of thirteen or fourteen, I was capable of appreciating the finest points of what Geyer did. This is not so peculiar when you realize that the opera, for me, substituted for and outweighed every other idea and occupation of the normal boy. My family were perfectly content to have it so; marbles and cops-and-robbers and baseball were all very well for other boys, but if I was precocious and opera-struck they thought it only natural.

Of course I have all our memories—those of Miss deHaven and Mr. Loeffler and George—to accent and supplement mine, for all of us were at Lena's performances, each in his accustomed place, and each unaware of the others. This is rather a compelling thought. In his own box would be Henry Loeffler; in hers, or backstage with Lena, Miss deHaven; George always had a single seat in the rear of the parquet downstairs; Maestro Pizzetti had good seats provided by Lena; and I was up in the balcony. Now, more than twenty years later, we can sit and review these performances with one another in the minutest detail, and after they knew I was to put it all in this book, George and Miss deHaven and Henry Loeffler would remind me:

—"Don't forget how she walked in *Fidelio*, David."

—"Do you remember that cry she gave when she saw Walther in Hans Sachs's house?"

—"Be sure you tell about her arms when she sang Sieglinde."

—"Remember when she'd let out in the *Trovatore* trio?"

—"Those chest notes in the *Liebesnacht*!"

A year after her début in *Don Giovanni*, Lena sang the Contessa in *Nozze di Figaro* under Mahler. He prepared the opera with the same insistent perfection of detail he had imposed in his famous Vienna production, though the Metropolitan could give him no fifty rehearsals. Lena of course he had trained at the Hofoper; the rest of the cast was very fine. Sembrich was the Susanna, Farrar Cherubino, Scotti the Almaviva, and Didur Figaro. Lena's versatility was never so startlingly demonstrated as when she sang, all within a month, Elisabeth, Sieglinde, Aïda, Santuzza, Brünnhilde, Marie in *The Bartered Bride*, *Fidelio*, and the Contessa. She was a picture in her eighteenth-century costumes. The white wig made her face arch and delicate, and her big eyes beneath the white hair seemed to sparkle like fire. Her movements contrasted so much with those of her *Fidelio* or Brünnhilde that one could hardly believe she was the same woman. Opera singers are seldom such good actresses that their hands and feet and carriage and balance change completely with each impersonation, but Lena's did. As the Contessa she moved with the most delicate feminine grace, floating across the stage with small steps (normally her tendency was to stride) and holding herself stiffly, yet daintily erect.

But when she began to sing *Dove Sono* she could have looked like a meal-sack for all I cared. One cannot have a

favorite piece of music, because music is nothing if not varied to a thousand moods and moments, but I believe if Lena were to come back to earth to sing me one aria of my own choice, I would ask for *Dove Sono*. As a grown man, in recent years, I have always, as I did all through my boyhood, wept openly when she sang that music. Even more poignant than the *Hoffnungsaria*, because it is less tense and dramatic, it literally wrings my heart. There is nothing so very moving in the yearning of a neglected wife for the return of her unfaithful husband, yet between them Mozart and Lena managed to distill into it every drop of heartache associated with love.

Her mastery of the classical line was something to evoke awe. She handled her voice like a stringed instrument, drawing her *legato* phrases with a firm, smooth roundness as if by superb bowing. I never understood why *Dove Sono*, which on the surface is comparatively simple musically, is considered so dreadfully difficult to sing. Lena explained it to me. She said that the *sostenuto*, which requires absolutely perfect breathing and control, lies in that part of the soprano register which is between the normal chest and head tones, and that most women's technique is deficient at that point. Of course the part of the Contessa also requires peculiar subtlety and feminine warmth, combined with aristocratic dignity and reserve that must never verge on the haughty. The Feldmarschallin of *Der Rosenkavalier* is conceived in the same spirit.

Lena's letter-duet with Sembrich was memorable in more ways than one, for the great coloratura was about to retire and everybody was overcome with sentiment. Lena's voice was so much larger and richer than Sembrich's that it might well have unbalanced the duet, but she tempered it with exquisite feeling and musicianship. As a little boy I was

much too ingenuous to sense any play of personal feeling beneath the stage characterizations of mistress and maid, but now that Miss deHaven has pointed it out to me I realize that Lena's attitude toward Madame Sembrich when they came out to take their curtains was just the reverse of her part in the play; she was tenderly respectful and most particular to give the precedence in every way to the older artist. It would have given Lilli Lehmann great joy to have heard Lena and Geraldine Farrar, her two most devoted pupils, singing together in a *Figaro* with Sembrich and Mahler—two of Frau Lehmann's own most honored colleagues. No other art, not even the theatre, has this richness of sentiment and the glamorous romance of handing down the torch, with the artistic generations overlapping, each lending lustre to the other.

The high point of Mahler's accomplishment in that season was his production of Smetana's *Bartered Bride*, given in German as *Die verkaufte Braut*. No effort was spared to make it as authentic as possible. The ballet was brought from Prague, and one who has not seen a native Bohemian ballet doing its national peasant dances has no idea what they can be. Mahler himself was Bohemian born, and so were Destinn and Geyer, who alternated in the rôle of Marie. The production sparkled with life and merriment. I did not hear it until its repetition the following season when for the first time I heard the Metropolitan's sensational new lyric soprano Alma Gluck as Esmeralda. This voice startled and excited me as Lena Geyer's had the first time I heard it; I remember being so thrilled when Gluck sang her delicious duet with Springer that I did not stop to wonder at her dancing on a tightrope. Lena too sang the Smetana music beautifully, and Pizzetti told me that as soon as she opened her mouth he thought, for the first time in years, of the way she had sung

Czech folk-songs for him as a child in Prague. "Nobody could sing that sort of thing as well as Lena," he told me. His prejudice is comprehensible; to him nobody sang anything as well as Lena.

As a matter of fact, Destinn also sang it charmingly, but she could not compare with Lena in looks and temperament. I never cared much for peasant costumes on Lena, preferring her always in something more imposing or beautiful, but she was a picture in the Bohemian native dress with the big starched white bow on her head and a beautiful embroidered apron which, by the way, had a story. Miss deHaven told me that when Lena was studying Marie, Maestro Pizzetti came to her apartment one day and asked her if she had ordered her costume.

"If you have," he said, "don't get any apron with it."

"Why not?" Lena asked. "It has to have an apron."

"I know," Maestro answered, drawing a package from his pocket. "Here it is."

Lena opened it and found a red silk apron heavily embroidered in many colors. She could not understand why Maestro had brought it. "Where did you get it?" she asked him.

"It was your mother's," he said. "It was part of her wedding costume. Once in Prague before I ever saw you, your mother came to me and told me your little brother Alois had to go to the doctor to have his leg treated and she had no money to pay for it. She asked me if I knew where she could sell a piece of embroidery to get some money. I told her to bring me the embroidery—I meant to give her the money and some time later also give her back the embroidery. I did not want her to think she could just ask me for money any time. So she brought this and told me it was all she had left of the clothes her parents had prepared for her marriage.

I put it away in a trunk and forgot all about it. I never thought of it again until you started to work on this part."

There was plenty of reason for us all to be thrilled about the Metropolitan Opera, for this was its second era of greatness. The first had been the decade under Grau, that incredible period of "The Nights of the Seven Stars." Now, after Gatti-Casazza had come from La Scala to take charge, the artists—all in their prime—included Caruso, Scotti, Amato, Gilly, Slezak, Goritz, Burrian, and Reiss; among the women were Destinn, Farrar, Fremstad, Gadski, Matzenauer, Homer, Hempel, Gluck, and of course Geyer. With four dramatic sopranos of the first magnitude—Destinn, Geyer, Gadski, and Fremstad—all of whom sang in both the Italian and the German repertoire, Gatti had a constant guarantee of superb opera. Then he had not only Vestri, and far better assistant conductors than the Metropolitan has ever had since, but until 1910 Gustav Mahler as well. It is no wonder that we heard, and knew we were hearing, the greatest opera in the world.

Nobody understood Lena better than Mahler, who loved her devotedly and paternally. He was by this time a sick man, and so destroyed by nervousness that he was a pitiful sight. He would stop at every few steps while walking on the street, and kick the back of one leg with the instep of the other. He had many other nervous habits, and his irritability grew worse and worse. But with Lena he was always affectionate and tender. They did only four *Fidelios*—three in 1908 and one in 1909. The last was the one I heard, on the twentieth of February. If the Duc de Chartres as a grown man was bowled over with emotion at the first performance of the Mahler-Geyer *Fidelio*, I as a boy of ten was marked for life by my experience of it. After hearing

Lena sing *Ich habe Mut* I have needed only to remember those words and the incredible grandeur of her conception to use them as an inspiration whenever I have needed courage. When she sang *Komm Hoffnung* it was the essence of nobility and faith and spiritual feminine beauty. I can imagine that Lilli Lehmann sang this incomparable aria with great magnificence, and I know of other women who have sung it splendidly, but each of them has imbued it with something austere and distant. Lena made it as personal as her own flesh. Her appeal to Hope was no cold classical declamation, but the pleading of a brave heart that must be fortified with holy encouragement; and when she reached the second part of the aria, voicing *Ich folg dem innern Triebe* with pulsating resolution, I was so inspired I could scarcely remain seated. I looked at her through my glasses while she sang the phrases of daring and her idealization of married love, and even as a child I could appreciate the genuine exaltation in her face. Her eyes were fiery and every inch of her body seemed to vibrate with the enormous authentic emotion she was creating. She did not stand still and gesticulate like many singers in this part, but strode at will across the stage, tall and imposing in her male costume, as if following a lodestar visible only to her.

The applause whenever she sang was always uproarious, but one thing in particular struck me at that *Fidelio*. When she finished the *Hoffnungsaria*, instead of the instantaneous outbreak of noise that usually greeted such climaxes there was a long moment of absolute silence. The house was too stunned with emotion to applaud immediately, but when it began it was terrifying in its vehemence.

When Lena first came to the Metropolitan she was so preoccupied with Mahler that it was some time before she was fully aware of other musical influences. She applied herself

passionately to all her work, though none of it was personified for her like the *Fidelio* of which she felt Mahler to be the creator. But early in her first season she was cast for a Leonora in *Trovatore* with Guido Vestri. Miss deHaven remembered Lena's reactions very clearly.

"She came in about five one afternoon," Miss deHaven wrote me, "from her first rehearsal for Vestri's *Trovatore*. She was quite silent, not at all like herself, for she usually breezed into the apartment scattering gloves and furs in every direction and shouting for me to come and kiss her or for Dora to pick up her things. She looked puzzled and intent. She sat down and drank a cup of tea, then she got up and wandered around the room, seeming nervous; then she went over to the piano and struck a chord and burst into the middle passage of the *Miserere*. Now this was nothing unusual for her to do—she was always breaking into some aria that was on her mind—but this she sang entirely differently from the way I had heard her sing it before. She sang it the new way three or four times, and each time she would look closely at the score as if she had never seen it before. Then she would shake her head as a person does who cannot quite believe something remarkable, and then she'd sing the passage again. After a while she got undressed and went to bed, taking the score along with her, and there she sat, as was her habit when she was studying hard, for perhaps two hours. She never spoke to me all that time—she was oblivious. Later in the evening she was sitting up in bed eating romaine lettuce with her fingers, and I was having supper from a tray beside her. She had hardly spoken at all. But presently she looked at me and said, 'Elsa, do you suppose there could be such a thing as a man who was always right?'"

"I answered that I did not see how there could be—the

very essence of the human mind was its fallibility. 'Yes,' Lena agreed, 'I see that, but in this case it isn't he himself that he claims is right. It's somebody else. And he has everything in black and white to prove it.'

"'Are you speaking of Guido Vestri?' I asked her. She nodded. 'I certainly am,' she said. 'Maybe I'm wrong, but that man strikes me as the most extraordinary musician I've ever heard.'

"'More so than Herr Mahler?' I asked.

"Lena looked at me very earnestly. 'I couldn't say that,' she said, 'because I don't know. But this way that Vestri knows every tiny thing in the score, and every particle of each person's music—none of the singers know it the way he does. You should hear what he does with *Trovatore*. My God, that old hurdy-gurdy stuff I picked up when I was a kid down on the East Side. I've never heard it before. It's beautiful, Elsa. It's marvellous. I'm wonderful in it—really!' She said that as if it were the greatest surprise to her. Of course I always thought her wonderful in everything, but her own judgment, when she could be induced to express it, was reliable. 'I never knew what was in this score before,' she went on, tapping the book beside her. 'Look here—all these rests between these phrases, and this place in the trio and there in the cadenza—why, it's too amazing!' She was ruffling the pages and pointing out the places to me; then she closed the book and lay back on the pillows and stared at the ceiling, softly singing *Di tale amor*.

"I saw that she was very deeply struck by her afternoon's experience, and I realized that the impression made on her was more profound than if it had been only a musical one. I asked Lena what sort of person this Vestri was, and what he was like as a man, to deal with. She looked at me for a while without speaking, and then she answered, 'Elsa, I

hardly know, myself. He is probably cruel and selfish and jealous and I don't know what else. He certainly has the most awful temper. But I tell you I think he is the most fascinating man I ever saw.'

"This was nothing less than a bombshell, for I had grown to believe completely in Lena's choice of a way of life for herself—a way in which men had no place at all. She saw at once how thunderstruck I was, and she leaned over and kissed me. 'My God, darling, don't take it so seriously!' she said. 'I didn't say I was going to fall in love with Vestri. I didn't mean anything of the sort. But you asked me what he was like as a man, and I tell you—fascinating. Like a witch or a tiger or something. Wait till you hear this *Trovatore*—just watch him, you'll see what I mean.'

"I should have been satisfied with Lena's explanation but I was very uneasy. Most people would jump to the conclusion that I was jealous—that I would always fear any man who made an impression on Lena. This was not true. But I knew the quality of Lena's own resistance to men, and the strength of her conviction that they could only obstruct her. I did not want to see her become involved with any man to the extent that he might dominate her thinking and her work—much less her emotions. But nobody could have prevented Vestri's impressing Lena. It was as inevitable as an eclipse. When I heard the *Trovatore*, I realized just what her first reaction to him had been. For he was actually like a fire sweeping through the singers and the orchestra and making them blaze as they had never done before. Lena was so inspired, so superdramatic, and she sang so divinely that those of us who had heard her at her very best before were bowled over. She was rising to a vocal and musical and histrionic plane that was new to her and to us—and doing it in an opera that we had always joked about and made fun of.

"Afterward when we were in her dressing room, Lena and Pizzetti and I, Vestri came in to speak to her. We had not seen him at close range, and even I, who am supposed to be so reserved and unsusceptible, was stirred. He was a small man, thin and nervous, and rather jerky in his movements, with a sharp, penetrating voice and black eyes that snapped and glittered as he talked. He had a short, pointed black beard and small, beautiful hands with which he always gesticulated. He was quite capable of remaining in repose but one always felt that at any moment he might spring, like the tiger Lena compared him to, and do something fierce and wild. Of course he was driven by the most terrific energy and he never found sufficient outlet for it except when he was actually working.

"When he came into the room after that performance he was in wonderful spirits, almost dancing with pleasure, and he patted Lena's shoulder and talked to her in Italian and said she was a fine artist and a real worker and a great voice and a genius and *una bella donna, una superba donna*—which he said with such frank and unabashed meaning that I was embarrassed. Lena only smiled and said she was glad the performance had pleased him; then she introduced him to Maestro Pizzetti. She called Pizzetti *mio carissimo Maestro*, and for a moment Vestri seemed to think she meant him. But when he realized that this was the man who had discovered Lena and taught her to sing, he threw his arms around Pizzetti and kissed him and called him one of the great benefactors of mankind. Pizzetti was overcome with pleasure—you know what he thought of Vestri and his opinions. Then Lena introduced Vestri to me, and I am quite frank to admit that he simply looked through me. He shook hands politely enough, but in Lena's orbit I was non-existent to him—and remained so, I might add.

"From that time on, Lena threw herself into her work so fanatically that I used to fear she would not have strength enough to last out the season. But I was wrong, because she actually grew stronger all the time; she seemed to absorb power and energy from Vestri. She sang well with the other conductors, and she devoted herself scrupulously to every moment with Mahler, but when Vestri conducted she outdid herself. She sang only Italian parts with him in the first season, but the next year came the first of a series of thunderbolts: he decided to do a Wagner opera, and he told Lena she was to sing the *Götterdämmerung* Brünnhilde with him. You know what the critics said when that was announced, and the furore that arose about an Italian presuming to conduct Wagner. Vestri paid no attention, and Lena certainly did not, for she was oblivious to everything except her work. She had known the rôle for five years, but she began to restudy it as if she had never seen it—and that right in the middle of a terrific season. She used to come home from the rehearsals and tell me what Vestri was doing with her and the rest of the cast, and she said she almost expected him to resort to gunpowder to blow some of them out of their faults and their pomposity. 'He knows so much,' she used to say in a despairing sort of tone. 'He's superhuman. No man can know all that and not be a god. I thought I had sung Wagner with the greatest—but this is beyond everybody—beyond everything.'

"You have heard Lena's Brünnhilde many times, so I will not go into details about it, but do you remember her *acting* in *Götterdämmerung*? Of course it takes a superwoman to sing that music, and most of them are just enormous vocal machines. Lena sang it better than any of them, and on top of that she gave the most amazing dramatic performance. Do you remember her face when she looked at Siegfried and

realized he had betrayed her? Or the way she looked at Guttrune after Siegfried had been killed—as if the woman were a whimpering puppy? And I can still see Lena in that moment, when every other Brünnhilde stiffens like a statue and freezes into a goddess about to do something superhuman; Lena used to droop toward the bier and linger over it as if she were, after all, only a woman needing reassurance from him. I think her way of projecting a tender, fallible woman through everything she did was the single most striking feature of Lena's dramatic genius. She certainly did in *Fidelio*, and miraculously, because she was perfectly convincing in her male disguise yet you felt every moment the woman behind it. It was the same with Brünnhilde—she never once was so much the goddess that you could not sense the soft woman somewhere inside. Probably the secret lay in her voice; she was incapable of screaming and bellowing, and she never tried to sing more powerfully than she was sure she could. She said that Vestri made such singing possible. 'He could play a tremendous *fortissimo*,' she told me, 'a terrifying *fortissimo*, and yet carry me along on top of the whole thing so I simply didn't have to yell. He would have killed me if I had—he knew how to use the voice and build to it. But he never let a voice conduct. He was the conductor, and you knew it every single minute. He had a way of making anything possible if you were willing to work.'

"Lena used to talk this way about Vestri and her feeling for him and it was all so natural that I felt she was living and realizing herself to the utmost degree. All of her performances were triumphs, and it is difficult in such a case to distinguish one sort of success from another. We can say that this or that appearance caused a *furore*, but there are many variations of *furore*; once it will spring from thrill-

ing singing of one aria, and another time from an artist's emotional projection of a whole rôle. The furore at the first *Götterdämmerung* came from a very deep and intense quality of feeling. There was something universal and absolute about Vestri, about Lena, and about the other artists on whom their combined influences were overwhelming. *Götterdämmerung* is so long and so heavy, but that whole evening passed in a dream. We never came down to earth at all, and when it was over it seemed impossible to come back to the world of reality.

"And now I will admit what you once suggested to me before I began to write these letters; Lena did undergo a profound emotional experience in her own life coinciding, I believe, with this first Wagner she sang with Vestri. Up until then she had talked to me about him with the greatest freedom, and she acknowledged only too eagerly the importance of his musical influence upon her. Lena always loved to learn, and she was tremendously stimulated by the fact that every bit of her work with Vestri was really a lesson. She used to talk about it with her eyes sparkling and her face glowing.

"When that unforgettable first *Götterdämmerung* was over, I went backstage to Lena, and instead of finding her at her dressing table, as she usually was, I was deeply disturbed to see her lying face down on the couch. Dora was standing in the corner and she scowled and shook her head at me—enough of a hint that Lena was upset and had better be left alone. So I sat down near her and waited quietly. I had thought she was crying, which she did sometimes, from nervous exhaustion after taxing performances. But she was perfectly silent, and ten minutes must have passed, when there was the sharp double knock on the door that I recognized as Vestri's. He always came in after the performance

to speak to Lena, and I knew that after tonight's historical achievement he must be exultant. Lena started and put out her hand and seized me, without raising her face. She pulled me toward her and said, 'Elsa, don't let him in.'

"I went out into the corridor and explained to Vestri in my broken Italian that Lena was overtired and nervously upset and had asked to be left alone. I thought the look he directed at the closed door very peculiar. There was something harsh in it, yet tender at the same time; he seemed affronted that she was not eager to receive his praise, but he made with one hand a gesture that contained a world of understanding. He went away and after I had gone into the room and shut the door, Lena got up without a word and began to take off her make-up. She was deathly pale and she shivered. Dora gave her some sherry and we bundled her into her clothes and took her home to bed. Next day she seemed quite herself again, and could hardly wait for the morning papers with their reviews of the opera. She did not care what they said about her, but she was intent on seeing what they said about Vestri's first Wagner. After that she went on working with even greater application, and I would have thought no more about her unusual actions. But I could not forget it, because it marked a departure in all her behavior thereafter: she stopped talking about Vestri to me or to anyone else. She never saw him that I knew, and I did always know her whereabouts, except at rehearsals and performances. She was utterly absorbed in her work with him, but when the work was over she seemed to shut a door upon the whole matter, and she refused consistently ever to unlock that door."

It was my hope in writing about Lena Geyer to draw her story, from beginning to end, from those about her who had

known her best in each period of her life. And to a large extent I have carried out this plan. From Maestro Pizzetti I obtained the outlines of her early life, from Lena herself some glimpses of the work with Lilli Lehmann, and from George Phillips her reintroduction to the America that she so passionately loved. I have drawn on Miss deHaven's letters for intimate glimpses of her that no one else ever had, and of course the manuscript of the *Duc de Chartres* was a godsend that falls to the lot of few biographers. I shall bring forward other witnesses in the course of what follows—chiefly Mr. Loeffler, and some reminiscences of my own.

Yet no matter how carefully one may piece the evidence together, there remains the hard fact that in the ten years between 1908 and 1918, Lena Geyer climbed to a world where none of her intimates could really follow her. Most of these years she was absolutely supreme in her art. She had already learned that to become supreme would require the sacrifice of love or any personal happiness related to it. It is hard to believe that when she was in the full flower of her womanhood she could sternly abjure romance in any form, and ruthlessly suppress the strong impulses of a physically passionate woman. I believe, however, that she really did so, and during this height of her career she had her reward in the fabulous music that came from the source she refused to deplete in any other way. But it would be too much to expect that after such tremendous damming-up and diversion, the greatest human power would not ultimately assert itself; and the time came when Lena Geyer paid a heavy price for the course she had chosen. Other factors contributed to the reckoning. But the basic truth remained: she was not superhuman.

Where each of her close friends has been able to sum up for me, and to enrich with warm personal reminiscences

every other period of her life, and thus to personify it, there is no such person who can bring her ten greatest years into our intimate grasp. Guido Vestri, indeed, was the personification and symbol of everything for which she had struggled and sacrificed, and under his baton she realized every ideal of her art. Her intensity in working with him, and her artistic devotion to him, went beyond her attachment to Mahler, which had been more childlike, a blending of deference and gratitude and conscience. From the day she first heard Vestri conduct she was passionately absorbed and powerfully inspired by his genius. For herself she brooked no standard but his, and to hold this standard meant unremitting work, rigorous practice, constant drill in music and technique.

From the other persons so influential in her life, I have received vitally important comment and reminiscences about Lena Geyer. But in the case of Guido Vestri I was ruthlessly frustrated. Some two years ago I wrote to him, explaining with great care what I proposed to do, and to what extent Lena and her friends had already co-operated with me. I asked him if he would be willing to talk to me about her, and to make the contribution to my account of her greatest years that only he could make. I told him that I would come to Europe to see him, and that I would allow all conversation to be guided entirely by him. His answer was a curt note saying that under no circumstances would he see me, and that nothing would induce him to consider my request. I was bitterly disappointed and humiliated, but it would have been too much to expect that every person concerned in this matter would see it as Lena and her intimates had.

Obviously I could never ask Lena herself to bring to light those hidden details which would have made the pic-

ture complete. Her whole intention, in giving me permission to write about her at all, was that I should be able to obtain from her friends, and to deduce from her subtleties, what I wanted to know. I was never to ask directly. So she forced me, tacitly, to resort to the far from satisfactory process of piecing together the almost intangible truth; of piecing it from the facts I could be clever enough to obtain and the implications I could be clever enough to penetrate.

The question, in a crude and hard nutshell, resolves to the matter of her relationship with Guido Vestri. Was it spiritual, emotional, personal, physical? Nobody can know. There was gossip about it at the opera, for every opera house is a hotbed of gossip and a nest of intrigue. Even if the stories were not true the world at large would wish to believe them; if opera houses were convents, laymen would still insist on gilding them with the glamour of fiery temperaments, jealous conspiracies, and flaming love affairs. That is supposed to be part of the operatic tradition, like white ties and red plush and curtain calls and the claque. There has certainly been enough fire to account for most of this smoke in the history of the world's great opera houses. But it does not follow that every artist who is gossiped about has done what he is said to have done. Many of them have not.

They used to gossip about Lena Geyer, of course. They used to gossip about Caruso, Scotti, Destinn, Farrar, the manager, the ballerinas, everybody—including Vestri. Everyone who remembers those days of the opera also remembers this or that idle conjecture about the private life of Lena Geyer. Even if they knew it to be true, people did not want to believe that she lived as austere and continently as she did. They could not see her pouring such power and feeling into her work with Vestri without attributing it to more than artistic inspiration. Yet had they

known Lena as a woman they could not have hinted at this. With all her heart she believed herself capable of only one thing at a time; she had trained herself on this rigid principle, and the very reason why Vestri inspired her so fabulously in music was because she kept her forces alive and concentrated there. It was only for a very short period in Vienna that she had had strength both for the duke and for her work with Mahler; the moment she began such a major piece of work as *Fidelio* she dispensed with love, as we have seen.

Her abnormal concentration of every natural force into her singing soon became apparent to those who studied her. She and Vestri had not long worked together before it was seen that each was artistically a pillar of flame and that these two fires swept together into one glorious blaze when she sang with him. Though she was always inspired on the operatic stage, nothing compared with her scrupulous musicianship, combined with passionate dramatic abandon, when Vestri was conducting. She became fanatical in her artistic devotion to him. She had a sense of completion and of utter fulfillment, so great that she neither expected nor looked for anything more in life. Just as she had felt, with the duke, the complete realization of herself as a woman, so with her ideal leader she plumbed the richest depths of her artistry and completed it. She sang like a goddess, like a free wild creature untrammelled by any of the hindrances of the ordinary woman, finding terrific excitement in the sensation of expressing all her passions in her voice, on the stage. And yet she was not a vocal machine. She was intense and sensual and romantic.

Convinced that Lena had really succeeded in expressing her whole inmost, passionate self in her work alone, I nevertheless found myself once, in talking to her, trying to pene-

trate the veil of her personal feeling for Vestri. It seemed almost impossible to me that a man and a woman of such power, fire, vitality, and charm should never have been humanly overwhelmed. Though I knew I was treading on quicksand, I dared to be bold. "Lena," I said, "I know that what you have told me is true. I believe the whole quality of your intellectual devotion to him. And yet—must I believe that that was all there was between you?"

As she listened to me, her expression changed slowly. Her features seemed to recede, to diminish in contour almost as if she were retreating behind a veil. She sat very still and leaned forward, so that I was looking straight into her eyes which gleamed like two emeralds.

"Yes," she said. "You must."

With this I tried to be satisfied. I was resolved to attempt no further penetration into one of the strangest and subtlest relationships I had ever observed. Yet, having made the resolution, I still was not content. My mind returned insistently toward possible truths, probable happenings; I knew as much as I have already recorded, but I felt there was something more to know. I could not help going back, in conversation with George Phillips, to the time when Lena's preoccupation with the Metropolitan, and with Vestri, had blotted out all her other activities and caused her so to disappoint George about her concerts. He had said then that he would tell me more about Vestri in the right time and place. I felt that the time and place had now come, and I turned to George.

"One time," he told me, "Lena was supposed to go some place with me and told me to pick her up at the opera house after the dress rehearsal she had that afternoon. I was tied up pretty late and the rehearsal was over quite a while before I

got to the Met. I was afraid Lena would be sore, she never waited for anybody, you know, but I looked around for her anyway and somebody said he thought she was still in her dressing room. I went back there and I was just turning into that little corner where the star dressing rooms are when I saw Lena's door open, and her just inside it talking to somebody. They were on their way out of the room—her hand was on the doorknob and she had her hat and coat on. Now it's a funny thing—why I didn't barge right up to her the way I usually do—but I didn't. She was talking to Guido Vestri and he was the kind of a guy you don't barge in on when he's interested in something else. And he sure was interested that minute. He was looking at Lena as if she was some new idea he was trying to learn—his forehead was all puckered up and his little black beard stuck out stiff on the end of his chin like a charged wire. They were staring straight at each other—Lena with a kind of level look, and Vestri with his eyes squinted up like he wanted to get a better slant on her. You could see they'd been talking for quite a while, and you could feel plenty—that little hallway was crackling with something, temperaments or whatever you want to call it.

"Lena was talking, in a very low voice. Now you know, Dave, I'm no nance and I think gossip stinks. So what I heard of what she was saying, I was trying not to hear, and anyhow it was Italian and you know how much Dago I understand. But she was right near me and I heard her say the only wop word I understand—*musica*. Yeah, I see you want to know what she said. Well, all I remember is four words—'*soltanto musica, mai amore*.' I guess I wouldn't remember that either, only it made such an impression on Vestri. He shook his head and looked at Lena the way the rest of us used to when she'd pull one of those great big superhuman stunts so you couldn't hardly believe she was a woman. She

was taller than Vestri, and she stood there in the doorway with him, both as solemn as owls, and I had the God-damnedest notion all of a sudden. Instead of Vestri being the big shot like he always was when they were working, it hit me on the nose that Lena was the boss right then. She seemed simply enormous, kind of like a Chinese idol or something, I can't explain what I mean. Anyway, all this happened in a couple of flashes, quicker than I've been telling it to you, and then she and Vestri shook hands, but with all four of their hands together instead of the way we would—you see what I mean—and then I eased up to 'em and things kind of broke natural. Vestri looked at me when Lena introduced me and said, 'Ah, so this is the pirate who tries to take you from the opera house.' He pretended to shake his fist at me, kind of being funny, and then he said something in his bum English that wasn't quite so funny. 'Beware!' he said. 'From now on you will be *fortunato* if you get any of her time. I am going to kill her with work here.'

"You see how it was, Dave. I guess that's what she'd been telling him he could do. That and nothing else, if you want my honest-to-God opinion. I'll go even further and tell you that she must have been a superwoman if that was what she got away with, because if ever a woman was wrapped up in a man in some kind of way, Lena was in Guido Vestri. Only I swear to Christ it was all up in the head and neck. That's the idea I got every time I saw 'em together. Lena'd look at him with this sort of fierce look and she was kind of solemn and stiff, except when she got on the stage and opened up. Then—you know how she sang with him, I don't have to tell you. They were two of a kind and he understood what it was all about. Maybe it peeved him, but he understood."

Though I took it for granted in those days that Lena could

perform any miracle, I marvel now at the amount of work she did. In one season she sang with Vestri in *Götterdämmerung*, *Aida*, *Cavalleria*, *Falstaff*, and the Verdi *Requiem*; with Mahler, *Fidelio*, *Figaro*, and *The Bartered Bride*; with the other conductors, *Meistersinger*, *Walküre*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Trovatore*. The next season she added three more rôles to her repertoire, *Gioconda* and *Eurydice* for Vestri and *Lisa* in *Pique Dame* for Mahler. The following year she sang *Desdemona* for the first time with Vestri and also the *Armide*. But the high point came when, toward the close of the season in the spring of 1911, Vestri entered her dressing room after a performance of *Meistersinger* that he had conducted.

In describing that night to me she said that she had "sung a very good *Eva*. At least I did the best you could do with that idiot, and Vestri's conducting was the most extraordinary miracle I ever heard. Those were times when you sang without knowing it. You opened your mouth and breathed and felt as if Vestri were doing all the rest himself. I was so thrilled by the way he had played the finale and made the chorus sing that I was sitting there with *Elsa* on the couch, just doing nothing, played out. I was too exhausted to take off my make-up. He came in very quietly, looking pale and dishevelled the way he does after a performance, with his collar in his hand.

"'You were a good girl,' he said to me in Italian. '*Brava!*'

"I began to cry. I don't know why, exactly, but he always affected me strongly, and when he was pleased with what I did I never could quite believe it. He was horrified to see me crying and made a great fuss over me and begged to know what was the matter. I couldn't tell him. I felt the way I had after the first *Fidelio* in Vienna when Frau Lilli told me she was pleased with me and all I could do was bawl. So

after a while he took a towel and tried to wipe the tears off my face and succeeded only in making a terrible mud-pie of the grease paint and eye blacking.

"'You're a fine kind of woman!' he said. 'Here I came to tell you nice news and all you do is cry and make spots on my shirt.'

"I asked him what he wanted to tell me and for a while he wouldn't answer. He wanted to tease me. I begged and pleaded and he pretended to be busy looking at something on the table. After a while he said without looking at me, 'I thought you might like to do Isolde next year.'

"I can't tell you exactly what I did after that; I have some memory of throwing myself on his neck and the two of us careening around the room, I crying and Vestri laughing and both of us talking and carrying on like a couple of maniacs. I couldn't believe it. Over and over I asked him, 'Do you mean it? You're not joking? Me—Isolde?'

"'Si si si si,' was all he said, and when he finally went away and left me alone with Elsa I undressed in such a hurry that my costume was all over the room from the chandelier to the piano. I hopped into a cab and rushed uptown to Maestro Pizzetti—he had gone straight home from the opera with his children. When I got there they were in the dining room eating some supper. I was famished. Luisa filled a plate for me but before I sat down I rushed at Maestro and nearly knocked him over. I told him I was to do Isolde next season and I expected him to be as pleased as I was. But he looked very serious and shook his head a little. I felt as if he had flung cold water on me.

"'What's the matter?' I asked him. 'Don't you think I ought to?'

"He looked worried. 'Do you think you ought to, Lena?' he asked me. 'Can you stand it?'

“ ‘Stand it? Why not? Look at me!’ ”

It was Pizzetti himself and not Lena who told me how she looked as she stood there. Her face was afire with eagerness and inspiration; her hair, which she had hurriedly slapped up when she left the opera house, had fallen down and was streaming down her back; her heavy cloak hung from her shoulders and swept behind her as she raised her arms to plead with Pizzetti and cried “Look at me!” She was trembling with excitement.

“What could I say to her?” he told me with a helpless gesture. “What could I do? My God, she *was* Isolde.”

Chapter Nineteen

HENRY LOEFFLER told me about his first meeting with Lena Geyer, which took place in his own house. He was too poised and worldly a man, and rather too important, to be among those who crowded the narrow corridor outside her dressing room after performances. As a director of the Metropolitan he could have met her at any time, but he preferred to think of her solely as an artist. He knew she had a compelling personality, and he was interested when people enthused about her, but he made no effort to meet her. It is peculiar that among the people who loved Lena Geyer best, the only one who at first felt truly impersonal about her, and admired her primarily as a musician, was the man she eventually married. Actually, it was through Mrs. Loeffler that they met.

The Loefflers had the fine love of music and art that flowers richly among cultivated Jews, and their house on Fifth Avenue was filled with treasures of painting, sculpture, tapestry, and books. It was one of the large New York houses to which an invitation was taken seriously by everyone. Young people did not groan over going to the Loefflers' receptions, and older members of society did not go there merely to stare and gossip. All were sure of hearing an hour of the best music the world afforded, followed by a supper of superb quality and judicious quantity. Minnie Loeffler moved among her guests with the simple dignity of a queen. For each gracious and generous act that her friends knew about, there were ten secret benevolences, and her husband's

charities even exceeded her own. And it was he who established the precedent of paying the artists who played and sang at his house the highest fees they could command anywhere; they were also considered the guests of honor—a courtesy rarely extended to them in those days, to the shame of some celebrated hostesses.

It was in her second year at the Metropolitan that Lena Geyer was invited to sing at the Loeffler house, and she was at first reluctant to consent. She told George she did not want to do it and even pretended she did not know who the Loefflers were.

"You know perfectly well who they are," George said. "Don't put on the vague superiority, Lena. You sing there."

"Is there a special reason? I don't sing in private houses. You know that."

"One reason is twenty-five hundred dollars for ten songs," George said, "and the other is that this is the only important private house in America—musically. I wouldn't let you sing in any other. But you got to do this."

So Lena arrived at the reception in the Loeffler motor, which had been sent for her, and was received at the head of the stairs by her hostess, who greeted her with the same grave cordiality she showed to all guests alike. There was no gushing, no patronizing. Mrs. Loeffler accompanied Lena to the small room adjoining the music room, where she was to wait until the time for her appearance. They sat side by side on a divan and talked of the new régime at the opera. Lena had had a tremendous ovation the week before in *Tannhäuser*, but Mrs. Loeffler avoided reference to that and spoke instead of the whole new spirit pervading the opera, and of the magnitude of Lena's contribution, rather than of her personal triumphs. To Lena this was refreshing and intelligent. She was conscious of immediate and deep respect

and liking for this unusual woman. Presently Mrs. Loeffler withdrew to greet her guests, who were arriving, and Henry Loeffler entered, followed by a manservant carrying a small silver tray. On it were a glass, an egg in a saucer, and a decanter of sherry.

"I have brought your prelude to song," he said in his precise, slow manner, his English tinged with the faintest perceptible accent of the German to which he had been born. Dora, standing behind a screen, put away the egg and the sherry she had brought. Lena was both surprised and pleased.

"Why," she said, "how did you know?"

He smiled at her gravely, stroking his clipped gray mustache. "I inquired about it, Madame," he said with a kind of finality that was both suave and impressive.

Lena sang one group of Mozart and Beethoven songs, and one of Schubert and Brahms. The audience listened spellbound, but their discreet, patronizing applause, the essence of "party manners" and tight gloves and gilt chairs, irritated Lena. "I would much rather have had no applause," she said. "I detested those musicales more than anything I was ever called on to do."

After the second group Mrs. Loeffler came up to her and in that fine, intent face Lena saw appreciation of a rarer sort than all the noisy applause in the world. "There was something about her face that made me feel consecrated to music," she told me once. "I did not know then that Mrs. Loeffler was delicate and that she was very much restricted in her activities so that music meant more to her than anything else. She did not compliment me or thank me in any ordinary words, she just took my hand and pressed it and smiled. Not in many years had a person appealed to me so strongly."

Henry Loeffler joined them then, and offered Lena his arm to go in to supper. On their way downstairs to the dining

room, at the head of the jewelled parade, Lena whispered to Mr. Loeffler and told him she was terrified of all the people. She had had to stand beside Mrs. Loeffler after she finished singing, and shake hands with most of them as they filed past. It had been an ordeal for her. "Do I have to talk to them some more?" she whispered.

He saw the pleading expression in her eyes, like that of a shy child. He smiled. "No," he said, "I think you have discharged your social duties sufficiently. Now we should let you eat your supper in peace."

He spoke a few words to the butler and drew Lena and Miss deHaven into an alcove off the dining room. The butler set up a supper table, while Mr. Loeffler disappeared, returning with four or five of his closest friends. Thus sheltered from the noisier throng, they sat down to a succession of exquisite dishes, the best food that Lena had tasted since leaving Europe. Again she was touched by Henry Loeffler's thoughtfulness and never forgot the incident.

Lena had intended to be among the first to go after supper, but Mrs. Loeffler joined her and she could not break away. Mrs. Loeffler spoke of Lilli Lehmann, whom she had had the honor of entertaining during her last season in New York.

"I was studying with her then," Lena said.

"Do you remember how she used to sing *Casta Diva*?" Mrs. Loeffler asked, her eyes shining.

"Nobody else could ever compare with it," Lena answered. "In the second part—" and before she realized it she was singing to show what she meant.

"Come in here and show us," said a voice at her elbow, and Lena turned, startled, to find Mahler beside her.

"*Mein Lieber!*" she cried, and to Mr. Loeffler, "how did he get here?"

There was a roar of laughter. Mahler had just finished a performance at the opera and had come to the Loefflers' for supper. He and Henry Loeffler were old friends, it turned out, and the banker had been among those responsible for bringing him to New York.

"Come inside here and show us," Mahler repeated, leading Lena toward the piano in the drawing room.

"But I can't," she said in consternation. "I'm full of lobster!"

"You could sing *Casta Diva* even if you were full of sawdust," Mahler answered, seating himself at the piano.

By that time the guests had all left. Nobody was there but the Loefflers and their eldest son and Miss deHaven.

Lena sang the *Casta Diva* "more nobly than I ever heard her do it," Henry Loeffler told me. Mrs. Loeffler listened with an expression almost religious in its exaltation. When she finished Mahler asked the Loefflers if they had ever heard Lena sing Bach. They had not, of course, for she had never sung it in public. Mahler nodded to her as if she were a student at a lesson and began to play the soprano solo from the B Minor Mass. As Lena's voice soared into the tremendous phrases, and the music rose in overpowering grandeur, Mrs. Loeffler bowed her head like someone in prayer. It happened that Miss deHaven, too, had never heard Lena sing this, and she sat there with tears dropping unheeded down her face and "an actual pain, a terrible contraction in my heart, from emotion. It was like the voice of an angel after you had died."

When she finished and Mahler observed what he had done to the feelings of the little group, he briskly polished his spectacles and said, "This won't do, Lena. You can't leave your good friends in sadness."

So she sang *Un Moto di Gioia*. Then someone, excited

by her Mozart technique, mentioned *Martern aller Arten* which she had never sung on the stage, though Frau Lehmann had taught it to her as one of her own greatest accomplishments. Mahler himself did not know that Lena knew this, or other arias of such formidable coloratura scope.

"But of course I know it," she said. "Do you?"

"*Unverschämt!*" he growled, and began the brilliant introduction. If this is not the most difficult coloratura aria ever written it is very close to it. Nobody present had known Lena in the days of her lyric and coloratura beginnings with Maestro Pizzetti and they were astounded now when they heard her voice in this new guise—the same voice, the same thrilling physical surge, the same vitality and luminous color, but tempered by one of the most astonishing demonstrations of technical skill its hearers had ever witnessed. It was the more amazing because they all knew that Lena had no occasion now ever to practise such a thing. What they did not realize was that the foundation given her by her two teachers, and the standard of accomplishment set her by Lilli Lehmann, kept this quite within her stride. When she ripped off the two bravura passages climaxing in high D's, and took the repeated C's without a sign of visible effort, they could not believe their ears. As she finished Mahler took his hands off the piano and waved them helplessly in the air.

"*Kindchen,*" he groaned, "*Du bist verrückt!*"

"*Ja,*" Lena answered, "*und auch voll von Hummer.*"

Chance had caught her in one of those mad, inspired moments when she could have done anything. Empty stomach or full, Mass or fireworks, it was all one to her. When she finally took her leave it was three in the morning. Mrs. Loeffler looked into her eyes and said, "I hope you know what this evening has meant to me, for I could never put it into words."

Lena had a profound sensation, which grew greater in the ensuing year, that this woman was a rare soul. "She never did anything particularly; she just made me feel like a better person when I was with her. She used to come once a month or so to have tea with me, or I would lunch alone with her, and she was the only person I knew who was neither a very intimate friend nor a casual acquaintance—you know I hate those. I can't explain why we had anything in common besides music, but she used to rest me just by being in the room."

Mrs. Loeffler had suffered for years from heart trouble and in the spring of 1911 she had a fatal attack. Her husband was crushed with grief. He had adored his wife—they had been inseparable for twenty-five years, and between them had created the richness of atmosphere and fineness of sentiment that Lena had found so rewarding. They had had an ideal marriage, and he told me that when she died he felt literally unable to contemplate one day of a future without her. As soon as Lena heard the news she went to the Loeffler house and found Henry alone in his study, looking, she said, more dead than alive. She was deeply upset and anxious not to prolong a moment of painful emotion.

"Mr. Loeffler," she said quickly. "I have come here to ask you something."

"Yes, Madame?"

"Would you—consent," she groped for words—"to allow me to sing the Bach at the funeral?"

There were tears in her eyes and he did not pretend to conceal his own. He gripped her hands and said, "God bless you, Madame Geyer."

The funeral was in the Temple Emanu-El, and the greatest pains were taken to keep Lena Geyer's presence a secret. Nobody but Henry Loeffler, the clergy, and the organist

knew that she was there. She was concealed in the organ loft. At the proper moment the organist began the Bach, and before the congregation recovered from its surprise at this departure, the voice of Lena Geyer—the unmistakable and consecrated voice—was singing the magnificent and solemn lines. She told me that she had never approached a task so difficult; surrounded by thousands of grieving people, herself profoundly moved, she was in terror of breaking down. "But sometimes," she said, "God helps us to do the impossible."

After this memorable experience Lena went about her preparations for her usual summer in Europe with a strong sense of sorrow and foreboding. This was in the greatest possible contrast to the circumstances of her life, for Vestri had just promised her the *Isolde* for the coming season, and she was preparing to spend the summer at Salzburg in intensive study. Miss deHaven realized that Lena seemed more than usually subdued after she said farewell to Gustav Mahler, when he finished his American season and sailed for Europe. He had conducted at the Metropolitan hardly at all that year, having his hands full with the reorganization of the New York Philharmonic, which he undertook at the request of the directors. This work had been too much for him; his strength was undermined, and when Lena went to the boat to see him off she was appalled at his visibly bad state of health. She bade him a tender farewell, promising to visit him in Vienna in June. When she came home that afternoon she looked pale and sad. Miss deHaven was concerned about her.

"There is nothing the matter with me," Lena said, "but I am terribly unhappy about Mahler. Elsa, I think he's going to die."

She brooded over this and apathetically finished the late season. One day in May, when Miss deHaven was busy with the maids putting away winter clothes and beginning to pack for Salzburg, Lena came into the room crying bitterly. In her hand she held a cable. Gustav Mahler had died the day before, May 18th, in Vienna. Lena was inconsolable. She had known hardship in her life, and a certain sort of sorrow, but this was her first great personal grief and she took it as intensely as she did all profound emotions. It was a gloomy departure that she and Elsa made two days later on the *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, Lena's favorite boat. She was tired after her strenuous season and very low in spirits. She went straight to Vienna, where she filled a cab with all sorts of flowers and drove to the cemetery to put them on Mahler's grave. She lingered in Vienna for two weeks, renewing all her sentimental attachments, even going so far as to call on the Intendant of the Hofoper and make her peace with him. He invited her to return for guest engagements and she took his invitation under consideration but was unable to give him any time. She and Miss deHaven took long drives in the Prater, with Elsa driving and Lena pointing out each tree and brook and path that had its special sentimental meaning for her. For the first time since her break with Louis de Chartres, Lena became nostalgic about him, and spoke of him often, which she had never done before.

"She was remarkably intelligent for so emotional a woman," Miss deHaven wrote me. "For a time I feared that she would be foolish enough to write to the Duc de Chartres and invite him to join her in Vienna. He had married, we knew, but if Lena had wanted to see him she would not have hesitated to send for him. I knew it would only be a mistake to reawaken the old fire, and asked her frankly if she did not think so.

"‘Of course I do,’ she said sadly. ‘It would be dreadful. But my God, Elsa, how am I supposed to live? I’m no virgin. I’m no plaster statue. It’s all very well to get worked up on the stage and fool myself that I don’t want to be like other women. That’s bosh. I do.’

"‘You’d hate it if you were,’ I told her.

"‘I suppose so,’ she said. ‘But—Elsa, have you ever had a man?’ She shot the question at me. She knew perfectly well that I had not, and in a moment was shaking her head over me. ‘I don’t understand it,’ she said. ‘You’re living a whole life without the most important thing in it. What do you do with your emotions?’

"‘You know what I do,’ I said.

"‘She nodded slowly. ‘You sublimate them, you idiot,’ she said. ‘Do you mean to say it’s enough for you to get everything you want out of me? Out of my crazy life and the noises I make?’

"‘Certainly,’ I answered. ‘And it’s enough for you too, if you are realistic about it. What would you do with a man, actually, Lena? What would you do if you had one hanging around this summer?’

"‘Kill him,’ she said casually. ‘I have to learn *Tristan*. By the way, we might as well push off for Salzburg tomorrow.’

"‘We had our same cottage there, in which we had spent our first summer together, and our wonderful cook, Anna, and we lived just as we used to. Lena arose every morning at half-past seven and had her coffee and rolls in the garden with me. Then I would go off to see about the housekeeping and Lena would lock herself into the parlor at the old upright piano and work for two hours. For weeks she did not sing a note that you would recognize as the music of *Tristan*. It all sounded like exercises. Then we would put on our

bathing-suits with long coats over them and walk to the lake to swim. It was only a short distance from the house. At one-thirty we'd have dinner—such dinners! *Paprikahuhn* with *Nockerl*, or goulash, or *Backhänderl*, or game—the most wonderful game in the world—venison and *Rebhuhn* and wild hare. After dinner we would sleep for an hour or two and at four I would drive Lena to Frau Lehmann's. Usually she had a lesson, working on Isolde, but sometimes they just visited and I would come back there in time for coffee. Or we'd go for a walk in the mountains, one of those terrific *Ausflüge* with Frau Lilli bossing everybody around. Lena did not sing in Salzburg that summer because as soon as Frau Lilli heard she was to do Isolde with Vestri she forbade her to do anything else. This was an extraordinary dispensation—it would have been more like her to want Lena to go right on with her normal amount of other work. But she saw that Lena was very low emotionally and shrewdly guessed that the quickest cure would be, not routine work, but a new score to study with Vestri's baton as the goal.

"It is undeniable that Lena had an abnormally emotional approach to Isolde. She had been building toward it for years and praying for the time to come when she might sing it. She seldom went to other singers' performances but every once in a while, during the years I had lived with her, she had dragged me to hear this or that noted soprano sing Isolde. On those occasions she would suffer tortures. She was sensitive to every slip, error, and misconception; it was her instinct to compare each different Isolde with Frau Lehmann's, and to find it wanting. Yet when Lena came to learn the part herself she gave it, as she did *Fidelio*, a distinctly different conception from that of Lehmann. Musically and vocally she modelled her work after her teacher's, but spiritually and intellectually she inspired herself.

"As the Summer progressed the wisdom of Frau Lehmann's course became apparent and by the time she reached New York Lena was all afire with her desire to start work with Vestri. He began at once—hours at the piano carving each note in accordance with his exacting wishes. After those sessions she would be tired and silent, but glowing with the most unmistakable quality of inspiration I have ever seen. You could feel her increasing in stature and power every day, and she lived with extraordinary imperviousness to externals. She was literally locked up in her work. One day when a charming young man, whom we had met through the Pizzettis, came to call with her permission, she asked me while he was on his way up in the elevator to send him away when he got to the apartment.

"‘But Lena,’ I said, ‘you just told him he could come up.’

"‘I can’t help that,’ she said impatiently, ‘I can’t talk to him. I can’t talk to anybody. I have to work.’

"Her way of working at that point was to go to bed with her score and sit there studying the dynamics. Though she already knew every direction by heart, every *forte* and *piano* and *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, she would read them over and over, mouthing the words of the text and sometimes singing, sotto voce. She was so intense about this that I used to try to tease her out of it momentarily, for I was afraid she would become exhausted from the concentration. ‘What about that man you were craving last summer?’ I said one evening.

"She looked at me as if I had spoken Chinese. ‘Man?’ she repeated blankly. ‘What man?’

"‘Any man,’ I said. ‘Don’t you remember, you told me what was the most important thing in life and said I was an idiot to go without it?’

"‘You’ll be worse than an idiot if you don’t stop talking

drivel,' Lena said, burying her face in her score again. 'You'll be a corpse.' "

I was twelve years old when Lena Geyer sang her first *Isolde*, in December, 1911. My comprehension had greatly increased. I had read every word I could find on the *Tristan* legend; I was steeped in the story, and my Aunt Goldie had gone through the score on the piano with me several times. Our household was just as excited in its way over Geyer's first *Isolde* as the Pizzettis or as Miss deHaven. The only person, Pizzetti and Miss deHaven told me, who was not wrought up was Lena Geyer herself. She had a rehearsal of some sort almost every day, either at the piano with Vestri or in a rehearsal room at the opera house with Burrian and Matzenauer, who sang *Tristan* and *Brangäne*, or a full orchestra rehearsal in the morning. She had had her costumes made in Vienna by the same atelier that had made her *Tannhäuser* and *Fidelio* costumes, and she refused to be bothered by the slightest anxiety about them. She clung to Pizzetti, never admitting that she was nervous, but obviously seeking support from his companionship. She was in wonderful voice. Her summer's rest had done her much good.

On the evening of the performance the Maestro went to the Plaza early to join Lena and Miss deHaven. The three of them, with Dora, drove down to the opera house in a hack. For some years taxis had been in use on the streets and Lena usually rode in them, but Pizzetti did not trust automobiles and he would not let Lena ride in one on her way to sing *Isolde*. Suppose the thing blew up! Suppose it caught fire! Lena let him have his way.

The dressing room was so full of flowers that there was no place to sit down. The largest and most beautiful basket

was from Henry Loeffler. Lena had all the flowers taken out, and putting on her dressing gown, began to make up. One by one people came in to wish her well; Gatti-Casazza, silent and ponderous; all the heads of the opera-house staffs; William Guard, the press representative, who told her he had a new book all ready for the avalanche of notices he expected. George Phillips hurried in to drop a kiss on the top of her head and whisper "Good luck, God damn it!" After her make-up was finished she put on her first-act costume; Dora threw a barber's sheet around her shoulders, and the coiffeur came in with her wig. Lena wanted to make a departure from the usual flaxen-blond wig of most Isoldes, and would have chosen a black one for the Irish princess if she had not been steeped in the legends of "Iseult of the golden hair." She wanted something more vital than the bloneness of an Elsa or an Elisabeth, and she had decided on a deep golden shade, with a faintly reddish cast, which glowed in the reflection of the footlights with fiery radiance. This is an exceedingly difficult color to obtain in a wig, and Lena's was consequently very expensive. It was wonderfully becoming, its vitality of tone seeming to spring from Lena herself.

She was all ready a full half-hour before the performance. She had not spoken to any of her visitors, merely smiled and gripped their hands, and all observed the extraordinary intensity in her face, the gleam in her green eyes, the firm set of her lips, and the dilation of her nostrils. She sent everyone out of the room and sat down for a last look at her score. Accustomed as she was to depending on her remarkable memory, she was not impervious to the stories she had heard her colleagues tell of stepping on for a premiere with a total blank in the brain, unable to remember one word of the text. Presently the door opened and Vestri

came in, pale, with the fierce look of concentration he always had before a performance, and the beetling frown that warned off anyone who might have been stupid enough to speak to him. In his sharp voice he asked Lena to stand up and let him look at her, for no detail of a production was too tiny for his supervision and he made a special concern of his artists' costumes. He scrutinized her carefully, approving her clothes and her make-up, murmuring "*Molto bella!*" as he examined the wig, and peering at her cheeks, which should not be too highly rouged. When he was satisfied, he went to the piano in the corner and played a brief passage of the *Liebestod* to emphasize a last fine detail he had stipulated. He listened while she repeated it with him, nodded, patted her shoulder, and went out. In a few moments the callboy summoned her to the stage, and the climax of Lena Geyer's career had begun.

If there were words to describe Vestri's *Tristan und Isolde*, all those who were privileged to hear it would not be helpless and inarticulate in their reminiscing. When he plays excerpts now in concert there are moments almost suffocating in the awful magnitude of their emotion. On a bare stage he paints the greatest love-epic of music so truly and so boldly that only the most innocent child could fail to be physically stirred; and even the child would respond to the sheer glory of the music. In the opera house he went further; he had the voices without which the great score cannot be wholly realized and he used these voices for the supreme realization of his ideals. His first notes in the prelude were like the kindling of a mounting fire; through the introductory phrases this expanding flame coursed, ever in submission to the will of the master, but burning with terrible power and beauty; then fading at last to the tense, pregnant *pianissimo* as the curtains swept apart.

On the divan at the left, in a sculptured attitude of grief, with her face hidden among the cushions, lay Lena Geyer, every line of whose sleeping body so expressed the despair and bitterness of Isolde that a sigh of comprehension ran through the audience. While the young sailor chanted his measures she remained in perfect stillness. Suddenly she started, raised her face and cried "*Wer wagt mich zu höhnen?*" in electric notes soaring above the orchestra. Little by little, as the dialogue with Brangäne proceeded, her visible sorrow gave way to anger; when she rose from the couch and stood erect and forbidding beside it, she electrified the atmosphere. Her gown was made of a heavy, dull white fabric which clung to her body, defining her firm breasts, her deep torso, the vigorous lines of her thighs and knees. A broad girdle of golden metal, studded with jewels, lay low around her hips, and from her shoulders swept a mantle of royal crimson velvet. Over this the fiery hair hung in flowing waves, with a narrow jewelled coronet above her temples. I have never seen such a regal figure on the stage, and I caught my breath in awe as she moved. Everything about her was electrical; the flowing movements of her garments, the radiance of her hair, the few, sparing, vital gestures of her white hands, and above all each sound that came from her throat, a sound at once so passionate, yet so sensible of its musical responsibility, that it was a unity with the orchestra in the hands of the conductor.

Lena moved less, and projected more, in this part than in anything she had ever done. She could stand rooted to one spot and with the expression of her face, the motion of one hand, the very set of her shoulders when she chose to turn her back to the audience, sweep the whole action before her. With irresistible fatality, heightened by the orchestra's incredible playing, the story moved to its first climax. When,

as Tristan stood before her, and she took from Brangäne the cup which her whole noble, defiant, and courageous bearing proclaimed to be Death, I felt myself choking with the fearful suspense; and the following moments were dramatically overpowering, when she seized the chalice from which he was drinking and tore from the very core of her body, "*Betrug auch hier? Mein die Hälfte! Vertreter!*" Then she drained the cup.

She voiced, I think, in that moment, the most extraordinary single phrase I ever heard: two simple notes swept out on the terrific surge of the orchestra's passionate interlude: "*Tristan!*" In that moment, Elsa deHaven told me, she knew that no human love could touch Lena Geyer; the woman had consecrated herself to a world of superhuman ideals. She sank into Tristan's arms with an attitude of surrender and desire that suffused the stage and the whole house with unashamed passion, and she so bore out the force of this capitulation that, when the ship had landed, and the welcomers had come aboard, she drooped exhausted in Brangäne's arms, overwhelmed by despair.

The ovations between the acts were unbelievable. I have heard many triumphs in the opera house, but none like the demonstrations of that night. Lena could have kept on taking curtains indefinitely, but she begged to be allowed to go to her room and rest. I shall never forget the excitement all through the house, during the first intermission, when people stood about shaking their heads and wiping their eyes and declaring they had never heard or seen anything like it on the operatic stage.

The second act was, from beginning to end, the distillation of erotic passion. I was too young to understand some of its significance, but from the first fierce anticipation in the signals of the fluttering white scarf, to the swooning

climaxes of the *Liebesnacht*, Lena Geyer and Carl Burrian (who was her compatriot in Bohemian birth) sang with utter inspiration. This came, very largely, from Guido Vestri in the pit, but Lena had within herself an inexhaustible well of genius on which to draw. I shuddered at the glowing fire of her low notes; her whole voice was used with imagination and flexibility and fearlessness, and through these qualities she gave everything she had—the tumultuous brilliance of her top notes, the sexual thrill of her middle ones, the powerful vibrance of her deep tones, more imposing than any contralto's. The whole quality of her voice was beyond anything we had hitherto known. Try to imagine the roundness and warmth of the greatest Italian voice you ever heard, combined with the stature and musicianship of a noble German one—without hollowness or coldness—and you will have some idea of her musical quality. I have heard no other Isolde whose voice had the consistently perfect warmth and strength of hers. She had all the power she needed, and she had the greatest of conductors to give her just the right orchestral support.

It was when she came on in the last act, hurrying toward the couch on which Tristan had been gasping his visions of the approaching ship, that I felt the full magnitude of the thing she had created. She was dressed in flowing gray robes, with her hair hidden beneath a long veil, and though she had begun the work by projecting a woman of rich maturity in the greatest of love experiences, now she added, through the imaginary passage of time, the acute quality of the suffering she had endured. Her love was transcending. She minimized everything else on the stage. She sang like a mortal disembodied, half transformed already into a tragic deity. When Tristan expired a sound escaped her, indescribable, terrible, and piteous. She remained motionless upon his

body while the music swept on to the tragic conclusion; and finally, as Vestri drew from his players a *pianissimo* that was the whispered echo of all love experience, she raised her head and slowly breathed,

*Mild und leise wie er lächelt,
Wie das Auge hold eröffnet*

. . . and went on to sing that incomparable expression of all tragic love as it surely was never sung before. Her voice was so whole, so encompassing, that it was something one could almost see as well as hear, something one felt like the touch of passionate hands. This I know now, from the cumulative experience of having heard her Isolde many times; that first night I could only weep, and so did many around me. Her last perfect note hovered over the descending chords of the orchestra, and like a wraith she sank into Brangäne's arms, to be laid beside Tristan on the bier.

No demonstration from the public could be other than an anticlimax to this experience. They shouted and cheered and yelled and stamped their feet and clapped their hands and screamed "Geyer! Bravo!" until she was almost fainting from exhaustion before the curtain, and it was finally necessary to put the audience out of the house. Rather more to the point were the reviews in the papers next day, typical of which was one critic's bold statement: "We were present at the making of history." And such was the fact.

Chapter Twenty

LENA'S home at the Plaza was a queer mixture of impersonality and strongly defined tastes. Her apartment consisted first of a very large sitting room (originally two rooms) which contained, in addition to the hotel furniture upholstered in faded gold damask, many relics of her household with the duke in Vienna. Nothing could have been less appropriate to Lena than a small crystal curio-cabinet full of ivory and porcelain and jewelled bibelots, but she had one. The walls were hung with four or five excellent paintings, all given her by the duke, and several tables held innumerable framed photographs of her colleagues and the famous people she knew. In the place of honor on the large grand piano was a huge triple picture-frame, with a magnificent photograph of Lilli Lehmann in the centre, flanked by Vestri and Mahler. One side of the room had four large windows overlooking Central Park, with lace curtains looped back so as not to obstruct the view, and in one end of it was a small dining table surrounded by four chairs, where Lena customarily ate her meals. She almost never went downstairs to the public restaurants, and seldom had more than two or three friends to share her midday dinner or her supper after the opera.

On one side of this room were Lena's bedroom and bath, and Miss deHaven's; on the other side, Dora's room and a big, bare, ice-cold chamber in which I never missed an opportunity to rummage. This was called the rag room, and in it were all of Lena's costumes, together with their accessories.

Protected by dust curtains and hanging in rows from poles close to the ceiling, were the glamorous accoutrements of more than thirty operatic rôles, many of which required three or four costumes. Here were the flowing white satin robes of Elsa and Elisabeth, and their cloaks and veils; the armor of Brünnhilde; the ragged animal skin of Sieglinde; the breeches of Fidelio; the exquisite crinolines of the Contessa; the classic draperies of Armide and Norma; the gaudy peasant dresses of Santuzza and Marie; the barbaric beads and veils of Aïda, among royal crimson and ermine, and the brown rags of Kundry. On the opposite side of the room were cupboards all the way to the ceiling. One section contained boots and shoes and slippers. Another was full of shallow, sliding shelves like those of a music cabinet, on which were arranged hundreds of small accessories—belts, gloves, purses and reticules, chains, lorgnettes, fans, and a prodigious quantity of paste jewelry—necklaces, bracelets, rings, brooches, rosaries, and other ornaments. Every one of these articles was tagged with an unbreakable tag that clipped on. When Dora was packing for a performance she assembled the costume from a list in a black notebook, knowing exactly how many pieces it comprised, and these were counted twice before leaving home, once at the opera house, and twice again upon their return.

But the cupboard I liked best of all was the largest one, where Dora kept the wigs, hats, crowns, helmets, and hair ornaments. Here, hanging from hairdressers' dummies mounted on stands, were the visible personalities of all the women Lena Geyer could so authentically become. The fiery gold hair of Isolde would thrill me momentarily, like a note of Lena's voice, and the long blonde tresses of Elsa made me smile as they recalled the ridiculous names she gave the "stupid goose." Black wigs on Lena were always startling,

and looked even more so in their inanimate state. Yet they contained a world of suggestion; the dignified high-piled curls of Donna Anna were a ridiculous contrast to the fuzzy wool of Aïda. Then there were the eighteenth-century white wigs, three of them, that gave Lena's face delicacy and sparkling vivacity as nothing else could. I loved to see her in those. Her Brünnhilde helmet was a terrible, heavy thing with an enormous pair of white wings; I do not understand how she could endure it, especially over a thick, hot red wig. But everything was there, arranged with fanatical neatness and precision of detail, for this was Dora's whole life, and she lived it to the full. There was even a plain black silk ribbon hanging on a hook in this cupboard, neatly labelled *Fidelio*. With this Dora used to dress Lena's own hair in a club.

Around the room were all the tools of the trade Dora had taught herself in years of shrewd observation in opera houses, for she had known nothing when she began. There was a sewing machine, a coiffeur's table with irons, pins, and nets—the opera coiffeur took care of the wigs for each performance but Dora was ready for every contingency. There was equipment for laundering and dry cleaning, and even for repairing and altering such unwieldy things as furs and corsets. On a stand in one corner was Lena's make-up case, a square, battered cowhide bag lined with metal, containing a bewildering assortment of trays, drawers, and sections filled with cosmetics, powders, grease paints, innumerable pots and tubes of pigments, and sticks and pencils of every color of the rainbow. There was a stump of candle and a tiny toy saucepan for heating eye-beading, and fastened in the lid of the box was a small ebony crucifix, the only such superstition I ever knew Lena to have. A religious emblem was alien to her nature, but to carry one in the lid

of her make-up case was eccentric, and she would never tell me why, or where she acquired it.

Her bedroom was a striking contrast to the elegance of her sitting room and to the fascinating make-believe of the rag room. It was rather small, sunny and airy, with plain white walls and thin muslin curtains. Lena slept in a wide brass bed, which always had a huge down featherbed, covered in pale green silk, across its foot. "I was born in the headquarters of goose down," she once said to me, "and poor as we were, I had my little featherbed. I couldn't sleep without one." Her bedroom was very simple and restful, not at all like that of a woman of the stage, but there was one startling note of luxury in the toilet set on the dressing table. This was a complicated array of brushes, implements, and crystal bottles, of heavily chased gold with L. G. marked in emeralds and diamonds on each piece. It was of course a present from the duke, and though Lena wore his jewels with less and less frequency, and finally not at all, she always used the magnificent toilet set. The duke had loved to surround her with things that reflected the color of her eyes, and she had many small personal articles of French enamel in a beautiful green color.

Miss deHaven said it was like playing house to live with Lena, because you never knew when you would wake up and find the rules of the game all changed. Lena had two characteristics it is hard to reconcile; on the one hand she disliked change and the effort to accustom herself to new surroundings, and on the other she was restless and unwilling to be tied down to a permanent home. Her apartment at the Plaza was the solution, because there was not a personal thing in it that could not be packed up and shipped anywhere on a moment's notice. After she had once settled in New York, she did not travel so much as she had before—though

there were always concert tours or summer trips to Europe—but she liked the imminent possibility of travel, and the sense that she had no domestic responsibilities to hold her.

“She never paid the slightest attention to anything in the household,” Miss deHaven wrote me. “That of course was one reason why she insisted on living in a hotel. One morning she’d wake up and tell Dora she didn’t want any breakfast, and ten minutes later scold her because no coffee had appeared; and another day she’d pick up the telephone and order breakfast for a coal heaver—meat or fish and potatoes, hot rolls, and two pots of coffee. She hated to plan anything ahead, or be asked if she would be in for this meal or that, and such a person really must live in a hotel or in a house run like one. And sometimes she would come into my room at two o’clock in the morning, with her hair in braids down her back and wearing a long-sleeved nightgown and a fur-lined wrapper. She would perch on the edge of my bed and sniff, and say, ‘Elsa, I’m hungry.’ I would tell her to order something to eat but in heaven’s name not to bother me; but she knew her action was childish and she would not sit up in bed in the small hours and eat all by herself. She wanted me to eat too. We used to eat the most fantastic things—anything from plain chicken sandwiches and milk to lobster salad and Rhine wine. I used to be sick whenever she insisted on that.

“Lena did not want to know how anything was done in a house. If she wanted to practise just when the maid was dusting the drawing room she would turn her out and forget her. Maids on that floor were supposed to understand Lena’s peculiarities and find time for her apartment when she was not around. They were well tipped for doing so. We had the same floor waiters for years, and since we were there practically all the time from November to May, they were

really like our own servants. Lena always found out their names and where they came from, and she used to give them opera tickets sometimes and send her old clothes to their wives. They worshipped her. She acted like a girl in her own home. She used to come in from a walk or wherever she had been, bringing a breeze in with her, and throw her hat and gloves to Dora, leave her coat on a chair or the floor or wherever it happened to drop, and give me a kiss just as enthusiastically as if she hadn't seen me half an hour before and every day for the past eight or ten years. She was perfectly capable of dropping into an armchair and putting her feet on a table, or of whipping off her dress in the drawing room and shouting to Dora to bring her a wrapper. Of course she did things like that only around me, but when Maestro Pizzetti was there—and he was always there at least once a day—the two of them would put their heads together like two bad children in school and make outrageous jokes that got them screaming with laughter.

“Their favorite parlor game was imitating opera singers. Lena would get a pair of her lace-edged drawers and put them on Maestro Pizzetti, over his black broadcloth trousers, stuff a pillow in his waistline, and tie a Roman sash around it. Then she would stuff out her bust with sponges and things until she couldn't see over it, put on a black wig backwards so the hair all fell over her face, to be torn away with tragedy-burlesque gestures, and throw some kind of an old rag around herself. He was Enzo and she was *La Gioconda*, though I am too charitable to say which singers they were imitating in the parts. To this day I have never met anyone who professed to understand the story of *La Gioconda*. Lena used to sing straight through it at the opera without the slightest notion of the whole plot. All she knew were the emotions incident to each situation.

Her burlesque of her unfortunate colleague was usually so funny as to be painful. It was like watching a Charlie Chaplin picture. She would do every single thing the other soprano did, swooping, scooping, hooting, flatting, bleating, singing *forte* in the *piano* passages and *piano* when the orchestra would drown her out anyway. (There was no accompaniment of course, but she pretended there was.) She never really hollered like Madame X—— because she took too much care of her voice. But, with Maestro Pizzetti going off to a corner and pretending to gargle while she rushed hither and yon, tore her hair, bent her knees and contorted her body, it was an unforgettable sight."

Lena lived always in this tiny world of intimate friendships, tucked securely into a niche against the vast backdrop of the opera. She detested casual social contacts with people who sought to meet her because she was celebrated. She often stood in a greenroom and managed with one side of her face to be effusive and charming to gushing old women, while out of the other corner of her mouth she'd hiss to George Phillips, "For God's sake pipe the duchess" or "When can I get the hell out?" On the other hand, in her dressing room at the opera after performances, Miss deHaven, Pizzetti, and George Phillips would be waiting for her when she came off the stage, and they would all sit and talk at once while Dora undressed her and the room filled up with other visitors. Gatti always stopped for a moment to nod heavily and indicate approval, and there would be other artists, the conductor, and sometimes a music student whom she had told Pizzetti she would see. Lena tried always to maintain her early habit of not speaking above a whisper just before and after singing, but her enthusiasms often got the better of her, and if George made one of his typical remarks about opera (which he thought

the world's rankest nonsense) she would roar with laughter. This was all a tremendous contrast to the atmosphere she had created about herself when the duke first knew her in Paris; she had always been simple and direct, but in those days she was much more European, more reserved and somewhat mysterious. Now, though she had no less feminine subtlety, she was breezier, more spontaneous, and more robust.

In her work, however, she grew ever more intense. She saw music from one point of view only: Vestri's. All other artistic matters followed in this train. His word to her was law. So earnestly did she believe that he was the final authority on all musical matters that she was incapable of seeing why anyone should disagree with him or fail to co-operate. If he called a stupid singer or orchestra player *bestia* or *porco*, that unfortunate was twice a beast or a pig to Lena. When he raged at rehearsals, flinging his baton away and tearing the air with furious gestures, she was as terrified as everyone else, and suffered as if she had caused the outburst herself. Sometimes he was so preoccupied that he looked straight through her when she passed him in a hallway. Then she would go away and cry. When he was delighted with her and came into her dressing room holding up his hands and wagging his head from side to side with his mustache bristling and eyes twinkling, she would cry again, this time with pleasure.

Eventually Vestri began to have difficulty in carrying through his wishes. The management refused him as many rehearsals as he wanted, and protested at the all-star casts he used in his favorite operas. He flared up immediately and threatened to resign. The first time Lena heard of this threat she was horrified, but she was not allowed to forget it, for Vestri repeated it many times. He knew only one way to give opera—the greatest way—and he could not

endure efforts to pinch him and make him retrench. In his last two or three seasons there was constant friction, and Lena was once moved to write to Henry Loeffler, asking his support in the directorate for Vestri. He answered that from the very first he had supported Vestri in every move and plan, and would continue to do so always, but he could not carry the whole board of directors singlehanded.

Between 1912 and 1915, Lena realized every element of the life she had slowly built for herself; she plumbed every depth of artistic experience. Her repertoire was so varied that each performance fascinated her as if it were a novelty. She sang *Tristan* and *Die Meistersinger* with Vestri, and all her other Wagner rôles, including the Kundry of *Parsifal* (she first sang this in 1913) with Hertz. In 1913 she added another new rôle to her repertoire—Amelia in the gala production of *Un Ballo in Maschera*. There was some suggestion of her doing *Tosca*, but this was not carried out, and she had no regrets for it. She had never sung Puccini—by the time she reached the Metropolitan, Butterfly and Mimi were too lyric to represent her at her best, and she declined to do *La Fanciulla del West* on the ground that nobody should compete with Destinn in it. During the last three years of Vestri's tenure Lena asked to be released from *Aïda* for the same reason; she believed every artist should be more or less supreme in one part at least. She thought Destinn's *Aïda* incomparable. She had a part of her own to which she felt consecrated, her Fidelio, which in 1914 was restored to the repertoire for the first time since Mahler's departure. She sang it with Hertz, and put her greatest self into it, but she told me that it was painful to undertake it without Mahler. "The difference between night and day," she said, shaking her head.

With her heavy winter seasons at the Metropolitan Lena

gradually gave up singing in Europe. The first two or three years she sang both at Paris and Covent Garden, after the New York season, but she said that Paris was too much of an emotional strain. She always knew that the Duc de Chartres was in the house, and though he never called in her dressing room or made any effort to see her, the enormous box of American Beauty roses that came before each performance moved and disturbed her deeply. She would not have been human if she had not constantly been on the *qui vive* for signs or news of him in his native city. Though she had renounced him so firmly, he was still her ideal of a man's love. She told me of the ways in which this was brought home to her. There was, for instance, a baritone at the Metropolitan, a Spaniard named deVillas, who from the night of Lena's début in 1907 had pursued her with the frank avowal that she inflamed him and he purposed to win her. Every time she sang he was backstage, whether he was himself singing or not. He was a handsome devil, over six feet tall, with flashing black eyes and a manner at once insolent yet appealing. Lena could not make up her mind whether she found his attentions diverting or annoying; at one time she would let him come into her dressing room (knowing that Miss deHaven and Dora were always there) and sit with her during waits; at another she would keep him out with a curt refusal.

He, of course, thought this part of her technique of flirtation, and he actually let her keep him dangling for over a year. So long as he was held in suspense he was amusing; he was full of gossip and risqué stories that Lena found mildly entertaining when she had nothing else on her mind. But no Spaniard will put up with charming evasions indefinitely. An evening arrived when Lena came off the stage to her dressing room and opened the door to find the room

empty. Miss deHaven had gone home with a headache, Pizzetti was away, and Lena presumed that Dora was somewhere in the building on an errand, probably with the wig-maker. She began to take off her costume. When she heard the door open she took it for granted that Dora had come back and did not even look to make sure. Then she felt her bare arms seized from behind and the hot lips of deVillas upon her naked shoulders. She whirled around furiously, but he was quicker than she; as she turned she found herself in his arms, his kisses choking her.

Lena was a match in strength for the ordinary man but deVillas was more powerful; she could not free herself. Rather than scream and cause a scandal she pretended to relax in his arms for a moment and let him kiss her wildly; then as if to kiss him tenderly in return she placed her mouth against his cheek and sunk her teeth in it. With a yelp of fury the Spaniard let her go, and she sprang across the room to the door. She flung it open.

"Get out," she said, while he stood shaking with rage, holding a handkerchief to his bleeding cheek and cursing her "in four kinds of Spanish," as she put it.

"I am going," he answered (the conversation was actually in Italian), "but you will pay for this, you bloody bitch. A fine sample of outraged virtue! Cast-off mistress of a moth-eaten frog-eater!"

Automatically Lena's hand shot out and clouted him across the other cheek. His face contracted in such a passion of hate that for a moment she thought he was going to kill her. But he turned and left the room. Lena tottered to the divan and sat down, feeling very sick. In all her years of self-reliance and buffeting about the world she had never had such an experience; and not since her parting from the duke had any man touched her. She was nauseated to realize

that for the merest fraction of a moment, before disgust had engulfed her, she had reacted to the man's touch with an unmistakable, and in these circumstances, loathsome flare. She was a passionate and an experienced woman, who lived now in self-imposed celibacy that she believed right. The idea that any male, as a mere male, could possibly arouse her, was intolerable. She had learned that love was incompatible with her work, and passion without romantic love she considered beastly. Its intrusion now made her ill with horror. Also she was terrified of deVillas. He was exactly the sort of man who would tell a story over all the opera house that would do her incalculable harm. Dora found her shivering with nerves when she returned in ten minutes from the drug store where deVillas had sent her on a fictitious errand.

DeVillas told a story, but its only effect was to make a fool of him and turn Lena into something of a heroine among her colleagues. Most of them believed anyway that she had some secret love life outside their world; it never occurred to them that she might really choose to live without a man. From time to time she met men who seemed attractive, about whom she even admitted feeling curious. But she could bring herself to take none of them as a lover. The duke had drawn her taste and sensibility so fine, had given her something so exquisite in erotic experience, that she had become impossibly exacting.

Shortly thereafter she became completely obsessed with her work under the influence of Vestri, and to stir up memories of the duke in these circumstances was too intrusive and distracting. So it was then that she gave up singing at the Paris Opéra. Before going to Salzburg, where she always spent the summer, she continued to sing a brief two-week engagement at Covent Garden each year, the last week

of May and the first week of June. But while she enjoyed Covent Garden, with many of her own best colleagues from New York, she had really lost her taste for the European atmosphere. Little by little she had absorbed the vital and youthful spirit of America, where everything seemed better and brighter and finer than it did in Europe. She said she thought and felt like an American, and therefore had become indifferent to the old scenes of royal splendor in Europe that had once been so important to her.

But what crystallized Lena's feeling about America and galvanized her into intense devotion and faith in it was the outbreak of the war in Europe. She and Miss deHaven and Dora were in Salzburg as usual and Lena was with Lilli Lehmann most of the time. As Frau Lehmann had once thrilled Lena with her accounts of the Metropolitan in the great days of Grau, it was now Lena's turn to give Lehmann her glowing accounts of the present Metropolitan, and the incomparable performances under Vestri.

Only a few of the delicious summer days had passed, that year, when the news of assassinations at Serajevo reached the little town, and the whole countryside flared. Miss deHaven has written me about it.

"I had driven Lena into Salzburg from our house, to meet some friends for afternoon coffee. It was, of course, the twenty-eighth of June, 1914. We were all seated in the garden of Tomaselli's, laughing and eating pastries, when suddenly the square in front of us seemed to explode in a mass of excited people who, a moment before, had been calmly going to and fro. Heads appeared at windows; waiters dropped their trays and napkins and dashed out; most of the people sitting around us jumped from their chairs and left their food untasted. One voice after another took up the

cry; all around us they were shouting, 'The Archduke Franz Ferdinand has been murdered!' Lena turned pale. She was always afraid of crowds and mob excitement, and she seemed much more anxious than curious. She seized my arm and said, 'Let's get out of here.' The gateway to the little garden was choked with people, and Lena looked about for a way to escape. She jumped suddenly over the low fence behind her and made me follow. We had left the horse with the groom down in the Mozartplatz and Lena ran the short distance there with me tearing after her. The groom had run off to join in the excitement, leaving the horse tied to a post; we drove home at top speed.

"I could not realize that the double assassination would be more than a momentary excitement, but within two days we heard nothing except talk of war. Lena's first instinct was to rush back to America, but we decided to wait until some settlement of the trouble had been made. We stayed in our house all through July; but toward the end of the month the tension was unmistakable. War was about to break out and Lena determined to leave. We had already started to pack, without any definite intention of where we would go, when Austria declared war on Serbia, on the 28th of July, and from that point forward the other nations were drawn into the conflict. Lena would receive each fresh piece of news with bewildered disbelief; when we heard that Germany had invaded Belgium, that England, France, and Russia were all fighting, and when our gardener and our groom disappeared from their posts, only stopping to tell us that they had been called to the colors, she became panic-stricken. To be in Austria at that moment was to be trapped in a ring of belligerents, and at first we were too frightened to think clearly. I realized suddenly that our only hope was to go to Switzerland, the only neutral country anywhere accessible; for

though Italy was not yet fighting, she had repudiated her alliance with Austria and Germany, and the feeling along the frontier was tense.

"It was no easy matter to get transportation, and we had the most dreadful difficulties over technicalities of nationality, for Lena and Dora were still Austrian citizens, though they had their first papers in America. We fell into the hands of a stubborn wooden-headed official who would do nothing but slap his fist on the desk, shake his head, and repeat that they were Austrian citizens; they could not leave the country in time of war. At last Lena telephoned the American consul in Vienna, who sent an imposing document, covered with American seals, declaring that Lena had contracts which required her presence in the United States and covering Dora's predicament also. With this Lena managed to obtain identification papers from the official for herself and Dora, but nothing could be done about Anna, the cook, who had also wanted to escape to America. This was the final complication; it took two days of our precious time to get her safely settled with some friends in Salzburg, who promised to look after her until Lena could send her money from America. It was nearly six years before we could get Anna out of Austria, and all that time Lena supported her.

"The train services were completely disorganized, and once we had our papers and tickets we still were not sure when we could leave. Every day we had to go to the railroad station with our luggage and sit there, waiting for a train. Lena was always the most impatient person on earth and you can imagine how she suffered over this. Also we knew that our letters of credit were no use at all and we were hoarding our gold and silver money. The longer we were kept in Salzburg the more we were forced to spend. At last on the fourth day we were put into a third-class carriage crammed

with people, and we travelled through the Tyrol and the Arlberg into Switzerland. At the frontier we found a train marked Luzern, and having no particular idea what to do, we took it. Then we sat down to figure out our next move, for we could not do the obvious thing that all the American travellers stranded with us were trying to do: they were all bound for Paris and London. In France or Belgium Lena was an enemy alien, in danger of being interned. We wanted to go to Bremen and sail from there, but to do so would have been to try to cross Germany right in the line of the troops that were moving to Belgium and the Marne. Finally the American consul advised us to go to Genoa and sail from there.

"We had to wait three weeks in Genoa before we could get passage, for every ship was jammed and all sorts of old crates were pressed into service. Ours, when we finally went on board, proved to be a cattle boat that had been used in the South American trade. It stank like the Chicago stockyards, and with Lena a bad sailor, and the voyage lasting fifteen days, you cannot imagine what we endured. Lena was seasick every minute of the time. She ate nothing but plain boiled spaghetti and drank strong tea, but it would all be up again five minutes after she had downed it. She did not get out of bed until I told her the Statue of Liberty was outside, and then when she had dressed and crawled up on deck with me, she stood and looked at it and said, 'This trip was worse than the steerage crossing with Mama in 1890. From now on—' she pointed to the statue—'I stay with the old girl, believe me!'"

With such a beginning to the season, it is no wonder that Lena was more keyed up than usual. She was so glad to be back in America that she went about embracing everybody she met; the reunions in the opera house, where most of the

artists had had experiences similar to hers, were uproarious. But she went through her work with a heavy heart, for she knew that this was Vestri's last season. His disagreements with the management had grown to impossible proportions, and he refused to remain at the Metropolitan with the restrictions of casts and rehearsals that they were trying to impose on him. He was nervous, irritable, and sharp all through the season, and by spring was avoiding many of the performances he should have conducted. With Lena, of course, he was as warm and devoted as ever; nothing could mar their devotion to each other for the reason that it began, and grew rooted in, their passionate artistic convictions and their incomparable talents.

On the evening when she was to sing her last *Tristan* with him, he saw her before the performance, when she arrived at the opera house. She was so pale and looked so woebegone that he was alarmed.

"Can you sing tonight?" he asked her. "Are you sick?"

She burst into tears.

"If I never sing again, I don't care, but tonight I am going to sing," she said.

And she did sing. Though other Isolde's she did were more dramatic, more tense, more passionate, this one was the most heartrendingly tragic I have ever heard. Her blazing anger in the first act was terrifyingly real, and she has told me since that she needed to think only of Vestri, to become herself a very Fury. But when she reached the *Liebestod* an incredible thing happened.

"I had begun all right," she said, "because all during that long wait before, I had been jacking myself up and getting myself in control, but the impulse to cry had been unbearable. Vestri knew how I was feeling and in some mysterious way he supported me as he never had before; I felt that

he was carrying me. All through the first part I sang as if I were dreaming, but I knew everything was safe. There was a great weight on my heart and this hurt every time I breathed deeply. I never believed until then that a heartache from grief can be a real physical pain like a burn or a cut. But suddenly when we reached the last tempo change to four-fourths, I looked straight at Vestri and the light from the pit struck on his face. I can't describe the look on his face, it was like seeing a god. I began the triplets, you know—in *dem tönenden Schall*—and when I reached the G sharp for the whole beat I sobbed—right in the middle of it. I thought I would faint. The orchestra is *fortissimo* there, but that angel brought it out even louder, and covered me up until I got to the next whole note, the D sharp. By that time I was controlled and he could make his *diminuendo*. After I finished I must really have fainted because I don't remember a thing until I was back in my dressing room and he was there with me, being so kind—oh, I can't tell you!"

Quite frankly, Lena thus admitted to me the intensity of her sadness over Vestri's departure. It was characteristic that, just as all her other feelings for him were most fully expressed on the stage, so too her grief overcame her there. Everybody believed that Vestri was leaving the Metropolitan because of his impatience with the directorate, which would not concur in all his artistic wishes. Lena tried to convince me too that there had been no other motive, no more personal one, behind his decision. But I could never really believe her and it was not until recently that Miss deHaven verified my strong suspicion.

"The year that Vestri left the opera," she wrote me, "Lena came home from a rehearsal late one afternoon and instead of coming into the drawing room to look for me, I heard her go straight to her own room and shut the door.

This was unusual, but I did not think much about it until nearly two hours had gone by and she had not appeared. Then I knocked on her door and she answered in a low voice and told me to come in. She was sitting in the dark by the window, with her arms folded on the sill, staring down at Central Park and at the lights flashing on the traffic. She had not taken off her coat, and her hat lay on the floor beside her. She did not look at me, but I went close to her and saw that she was weeping—that she had been for a long time. She did not sob or make a sound, but tears rolled steadily down her face and she made no effort to wipe them away. I was dreadfully upset, and ordinarily I would have put my arms around her and tried to comfort her, without knowing the cause of her distress. But this time I could not do that. She was remote and austere and somehow terrible. I cannot explain why she was so very forbidding, but she made me feel like a blundering child just by being in her presence.

"I stood beside her for quite a time, knowing that if she had not wanted me in the room at all she would have said so. We both stared out of the window, I standing by Lena with my hand on her shoulder. There was something unbearably tragic about that silent weeping; if she had broken down and flung herself on the bed and cried and sobbed like most women she would have been much less heartrending. It is a very peculiar thing that, although when I first came into the room I had no idea of the reason for her unhappiness, and though we did not say a word in the first fifteen or twenty minutes that I stood there with her, I began slowly to have a sensation of understanding what the trouble was. It may seem ridiculous to say so, but somehow through the physical contact of my hand on Lena's shoulder, I felt as if an explanation of her grief were silently passing from her

to me. I would not have spoken for anything in the world, but I knew that eventually she would; and she did.

" 'He is going away,' she said, with a peculiar note of resonance in her voice, though it was pitched extremely low. There was another long silence. Then I said, 'You have known that for some time, Lena. He has been threatening to leave all this year.'

"She stood up suddenly and began to take off her clothes with swift, sweeping movements. She did not turn on the light. She put on a long, dark robe and took down her hair and began to comb it. Presently she said, 'Yes, I did know he was leaving. But I tried to believe it was just trouble with the management.'

" 'And wasn't it?' I asked.

" 'Oh, yes, it was,' she answered. 'He really has been fighting with them all this time. But he would have stayed—under certain conditions.'

"Then I understood that Vestri must have told her long since that he would put up with any difficulty at the opera if she would consent to be his mistress. I knew very well that she had never consented, and never would. And now she was reaping the consequences of this impasse. With the tears still rolling down her face and dropping on her breast, she told me, during the next hours, what had happened. Vestri had come to her and told her that he had definitely determined to leave the opera, and would do so at the expiration of his present contract. 'He told me,' Lena said, 'that he could not stand the sight of me any longer. For a moment I was horrified, because I thought he meant what that phrase literally means, but then I saw what he was trying to say. He told me that he had tried for more than five years to work with me on my terms and forget me as a woman and not want to

make love to me. But he can't stand that any longer and he has made up his mind to go.'

" 'Isn't it better?' I asked after a time.

"Lena shuddered. 'Of course,' she said, 'if you call it better to be governed by passion rather than reason.'

"I pointed out to her that Vestri was actually being governed by reason; that he was doing the only thing he could do. It was unreasonable of her to expect him to stay and be tortured by her presence, just because she felt him essential to her work.

" 'But I'm essential to his work, too!' she cried. 'He says he will never find a woman again who can do for his musical ideals what I can do. I nearly broke down when he said that, and he saw it and grew very excited and began to plead with me to go with him. He is going back to Europe where he says he can do anything he wants and he tried to make me go too. I told him that if I did go with him things would always be as they had been between us, because I felt that was the only way I could sing. I could never live with him and work with him too—I know I'd sing badly. He thinks that insane of me and he wants to prove I'm wrong. Oh, it's all a horrible mess.'

" 'Would you even consider going with him, Lena?' I asked.

"She shook her head slowly. 'Nothing would induce me to. That's what's the matter. I'm torn between terribly strong forces and I could not make up my mind at all if I did not feel first of all that I belong in America. I'm here and I mean to stay here and I told Guido Vestri that this afternoon. So now he's going away and God knows what will become of me,' she said with a groan.

"For once there was nothing in the world I could do to help Lena; it was her problem and a grave one, and she had

to fight it through alone. But when she said she belonged to America, I felt a terrific thrill of pride and confidence in her, I don't know why. After all, an opera singer cannot be expected to look beyond the ordinary limits of her ambitions and her career, but Lena was doing so, and doing so in the face of one of the most tortuous emotional struggles I have ever witnessed in anybody. She believed that the whole inspiration of her best work lay in Vestri, but she knew that if she abandoned her original resolution about him, confusion would follow and probably poor singing as well. She finished out his last year on the highest possible peak of power and perfection, and nobody but I knew what she was going through. When she broke on that G sharp in her last *Isolde*, I knew with an excruciating pang that in a sense her heart broke too."

Vestri sailed back to Italy the following week, and never returned to the Metropolitan. He ignored all pleas, offers, and cabled messages of assurance that he could have everything he wanted, on his own terms, if he would return. Lena went about like someone in mourning. When she went down to the opera house to sign a new contract she could hardly see the page or hold the pen, so shaken was she by emotion. Her wild, youthful impulse in leaving the Vienna Hofoper with Mahler could not be duplicated now. These circumstances were different in every way from Mahler's break with the Hofoper. At that time she had resigned on the rising crest of her career, with the Metropolitan ahead of her. Now there was no next step in opera; it was either the Metropolitan or no opera at all. And she had permanently chosen America. Her voice was as fine as ever; she thought her love for the operatic stage would carry her along on momentum. But she soon found that the well-spring of her inspiration was gone. She never felt the same

about it again. Before signing her new Metropolitan contract, she had told George Phillips to go ahead and book all the concerts he liked from now on, and to shorten her Metropolitan season accordingly.

Chapter Twenty-one

THE beginning of the 1915 season marked many changes for Lena. She and Miss deHaven had spent the past summer in a fishing village on Cape Cod, a spot that George Phillips, who was born near there, had selected for her. Nothing could have been a greater contrast to Salzburg, where she had been for so many summers. She had had long swims every day, lazy hours on the beach, and had made two or three good friends among the village people, who, if they did know she was a great prima donna, hardly understood what it meant. To them she was just a nice, good-natured woman from New York who had rented a summer cottage and made herself pleasant to the neighbors. Sometimes they heard her singing in her little house and would always stop to lean against the white picket fence and listen. They agreed she had a pretty good voice. Once in a while a motor-car full of goggled tourists would stop in the village and inquire where Lena Geyer the great opera singer lived, but for the most part she was happy in her seclusion.

And one thing in particular delighted her; the food. She had not believed George when he told her she would love the local products and the Massachusetts cooking, but after he reminded her how she liked Boston, she doubtfully consented to try it out. He found the best cook in the village for her, a rock-ribbed Mrs. Robinson who would not have stood Lena's eccentric winter habits for one day. But since there was nothing to do all summer except to be on time for meals there was no trouble. Lena used to describe those meals

till my mouth watered; the lobsters, right from the wharf down the village street, that Mrs. Robinson would broil and serve with melted butter; or sometimes serve cold for supper. "And she used to make a lobster stew," Lena said, "that was like perfume. Why can't you get good lobsters anywhere else? Those used to melt on your tongue." And the clams—once every two weeks they had a steamed-clam dinner and Lena said it kept her busy all afternoon. The chowders she loved—haddock or clam or lobster—with bits of salt pork and onion and cubes of potato, and those big tough white crackers they crumbled in them. The chicken stew with dumplings. The corn on the cob. "I never knew what it was like until then," Lena said, "and I used to eat eight or ten ears at a sitting."

Her first New England boiled dinner. "Do you know," Lena said, "that day was the time I felt completely and absolutely American. When I tasted that corned-beef with cabbage and beets and carrots and turnips and little new potatoes—all cooked so they were fresh and bright-colored instead of like old rags—I took back every dirty crack I ever made about food in America. It even made me forget about Dead Branch, Oklahoma. . . . The baked beans and brown bread she made us every Saturday night for supper," Lena raved, "and her hot gingerbread with whipped cream. And her pies! Oh my God, those pies! Huckleberry with the juice all thick and oozing, and apple pie made from the sour little apples that grew in the front yard, and blackberry pie, and *elderberry* pie! Did you ever taste elderberry pie, David? I had always thought those berries poisonous."

Lena needed the strength and quiet she had stored up on her summer holiday when she started out on tour that fall. George had her booked solidly from the middle of October

till the first of December. She was to sing at the Metropolitan for eight weeks in the middle of the season, and go on tour again in February, March, and the first part of April. "At first I didn't see how I could keep it up," she told me, "but after a while I got into the routine and it wasn't so bad. Of course I never did a thing but sleep and eat between concerts; I never saw a soul but Elsa and Sam, and George if he was there. I didn't take things as hard as I used to, and they all made a great effort to make me comfortable. We used to lose all track of time on tour. One town looked exactly like another. The houses were always jammed, and the public was wonderful to me. I seldom sang more than twice a week. I had never allowed myself to sing oftener than that, except once in a while in an emergency, so it didn't take any more out of my voice than staying in New York at the opera. But even though I hated the trains and the hotels and the blizzards and the ghastly food and the ugliness, I always knew that down inside somewhere I had fallen in love with America and no audiences I had ever known appealed to me personally like those people out in the sticks. They were just plain folks, with no nonsense, and their loyalty was wonderful. At least," she added after a moment, "in those days it was."

But a strong current was working up from underneath the surface of matter-of-fact America. Europe was at war, and though it was the general American sentiment that it was none of our business and we were well out of it, there was unmistakable indication of hatred for Germany long before the crisis was precipitated. Lena's only attitude toward the war in those days was bewildered and protesting horror; she had no strong feeling for either side, and felt so secure and proud in her new American citizenship that she could not really concern herself with the cause of any of the belliger-

ents. She only knew that she herself had as much reason to hate the Germany of the Kaiser and his Prussian military caste as anyone, and hate it she did; but this was not recent, it was a long-lived repulsion dating from her experience in Berlin in 1902. On the other hand she had every reason, professional and personal, to love France, where she had always been so honored and where the duke had represented to her every admirable quality of the French character.

Musicians, because of their internationalism, are always hard hit by nationalistic violence, bitterness, and propaganda, as we have had so sharply brought home to us since 1933. We have forgotten many of the influences and mass sentiments of the war years, and it is hard to acknowledge that we could ever have been unjust and barbarous as we were to Karl Muck in 1917. No amount of war hysteria can justify the hounding, persecuting, and fourteen-month imprisonment of one of the world's greatest artists, who was never proved guilty of the "espionage" with which he was charged. On the other hand, the political intrigues of Captain Hans Tauscher, the husband of Johanna Gadski, had by the spring of 1917 become an open scandal. Their home was known to be the stronghold of violent pro-German feeling among musicians. Most of the German contingent of the Metropolitan associated privately with the Gadski-Tauschers, and it was only out of respect for her long career as an artist that she was permitted to avoid open dismissal by finishing the season and handing in her resignation. Lena Geyer had just returned from her spring concert tour when the United States declared war on Germany, and she found herself saying farewell to German-born colleagues with whom she had worked for many years. It was not yet decided that the Metropolitan should abandon German opera, and Gatti declared his firm intention of keep-

ing the usual Wagner in the repertoire for the coming season; but the following November, after five of the chief German artists had returned to the United States to fulfill their contracts, they were all dismissed, and the announcement was made that no more German opera would be given.

At one stroke all the artists and chorus singers of enemy-alien classification were cleared out, and the only singers who remained from the German-singing contingent were those of American or neutral birth, or naturalized American citizens. Lena Geyer came within the latter class, and after 1915 there could be no question of her political status. But by this time the press was seething with hysterical hatred for "Germans"—a term loosely used to denote anyone of Teutonic identification, however remote—and with rivers of abuse levelled at artists like Frieda Hempel and Fritz Kreisler. Lena escaped this public persecution; it was generally known in New York that she had first come to the United States as a child, that she was an American citizen, and that she was not really of Teutonic extraction at all.

But from two very different sources she began to feel the harassing plague of propaganda. Wherever she went on the road there was sure to be some officious person or group of persons who made it their business to look into her background and antecedents, and go to the local manager with the assertion that this woman was "German" and should not be allowed to appear. And in the Metropolitan itself, where she had always gone her way more or less in serene oblivion of jealousy, there were singers who now dug up whispered scraps of scandal about "the Crown Prince" and made other fictitious and disgraceful hints about her character and associates during her few years at the Berlin Opera. Neither on the road nor at the opera did such viciousness ever precipitate an actual question as to whether she should appear, but to

Lena, with her enormous pride and her genuine devotion to art, it was crucifixion.

This very pride, and her utter superiority to lies, cabals, and petty intrigues, would have caused her to sing whether she inwardly wanted to or not. But she did want to. She was intensely idealistic, with the passionate romanticism of the immigrant who has found America the promised land. She had come into possession of a country, and the deep wells of patriotism, that all the favor of an Emperor and the honors of his court had never touched, now sprang forth in her genuine love for the United States. She used to talk to George Phillips about it with tears in her eyes; sometimes while riding across the Kansas prairies or the Nebraska wheatfields, on the interminable dusty treks that every traveler loathes, she would point out of the window and turn to him with an inarticulate murmur of emotion. "I love it," she would say. "I *love* it." Once he found her in bed in her hotel in Boise, Idaho, weeping passionately over a book that lay face down on the blankets. George picked it up; it was Willa Cather's *My Antonia*. "Those are my people," Lena said in a strangled tone. "I'm like that. It's so beautiful I can't bear it."

When we were actually at war, and patriotic women were exerting themselves to do every imaginable kind of war work, Lena's instincts too were to throw herself into the maelstrom of enthusiasm. But she could not knit or sew—such things would have seemed trivial to her in any case—she could not sit in parish houses and roll bandages all day, nor drive an automobile in an Emergency Corps, nor study nursing in a hospital. She bought Liberty Bonds and subscribed to war charities to the limit of her resources, but her only means of making the great personal contribution she longed to supply was to sing. With all her heart she believed

that in such a time both soldiers and civilians could be uplifted and inspired by great music. She wanted only to bring it to them. She knew that some of her colleagues in the concert field, like Alma Gluck, were sometimes sent to the great training camps to sing for thirty and forty thousand men, and she longed to do likewise. She spoke to George about it, who got in touch with Washington, but before a decision was reached she had a crushing experience in Kansas City.

This was at the end of November, 1917. Lena was on her way back from a Western tour, and was facing her coming season at the Metropolitan with apathy and even dread. Not only had the two seasons without Vestri been a severe drain on her, for she had resorted to working up within herself the galvanic power which she formerly depended upon him to supply, but the whole atmosphere of the opera house had grown increasingly unsympathetic after his departure. So far she had sung with never a suggestion of diminishing power and inspiration, but she felt, she said, as if she were walking on quicksand; the thing had no reality and no spiritual vitality. One poor conductor after another had dragged a sloppy orchestra in her wake, and each performance had been for her a vast physical effort like pushing a truck out of a ditch. This was what she was facing when she reached Kansas City on her return from the Western trip in question. All that fall her concerts had been as well patronized as usual, and most of the applause as spontaneous and sincere; but Lena had not failed to notice the mean-minded people who found ways of bringing questions of her nationality and political sympathies into the picture. She herself had forestalled a whole avalanche of criticism by deciding not to sing in the German language, and had had all her German *Lieder* translated into English; but she was often forced to plead the cause of the universality of art, and

to point out the stupidity of condemning the music of Schubert and Beethoven because its composers were Teutons.

George was a shrewd and practical man, and he kept his ear to the ground. He had not been out to California with Lena, but he was in close touch with the local managers and he knew of the rising tide of resentment against her, emanating from such sources as the Daughters of the American Revolution and certain hitherto-German elements that were now hysterical in their readiness to proclaim their American patriotism. He might have made it easier for Lena, if he had been with her, but the distracted state of his business forced him to stay in New York.

When she came out on the stage for her first group in the Kansas City recital there was a warm welcome of applause. But Lena, trained to the fine-drawn reactions of an audience like a cavalry horse to every manœuvre, sensed instantly that there was trouble in the air. She did not hear anything; she only knew, looking down into the massed faces before her, that a dangerous spirit of hostility was rife somewhere just beneath the surface. She sang *The Star Spangled Banner*, as was customary during the war, and with the deep emotion she truly felt; then the audience sat down and she went on to her first number, *Come Beloved* by Handel. When she finished the applause began, but in a moment a voice snarled from the back of the hall, "We don't want your damned German composers!" Lena recoiled inwardly, but stood motionless. No use to tell the boor that Handel was English by every tenet of usage and tradition. The applause continued, but faded as another voice yelled, "We don't want any more German singers, either!"

"To hell with the Kaiser!" shouted another man, and "Kill the Huns!" burst from someone in the gallery.

"To hell with Lena Geyer and all other foreigners!" she

heard, dizzy as if in an anæsthetic. Pandemonium broke. The audience rose, stamped its feet, shouted, screamed abuse, and hissed. But nobody attempted to leave the hall. Clinging to the piano for support, shaking her head at Sam when he started to rise from the piano stool and come to her side, Lena Geyer stood and held her ground. She fixed the ugly, rioting faces in the front row with her eyes. She knew the power of those eyes. She selected one burly man directly in front of her, and stared him steadily down. When she knew that he would listen to her, she leaned forward, oblivious of the rioting around her, and still holding his eyes immovably, said clearly, "I have something to say."

For a moment the man hesitated, as if to spit some retort at her. But she still held his eye. As if in a trance he left his place, climbed the short flight of steps to the stage, and walked to her side. Lifting his hands to his mouth he cupped them and roared 'Stop! Silence! Stop! She says she has something to say.'

His words were taken up by the crowd and passed quickly through the house. Lena stood there, motionless, with her eyes riveted on the faces nearest her. The noise began to die down. Presently the house was perfectly quiet—ominously quiet. "Thank you," she said to the man beside her, and stepped forward to the edge of the stage. She began to speak, her voice steady and resonant, her cheeks flaming.

"I do not know why you have chosen to do this to me," she began. "You have all been my friends for years. But I believe that you think this is patriotism, that you think you are doing your country a favor by persecuting me. I would do the United States, which is my country too, any favor, any sacrifice—even to suffering at your hands, if that is what you want. But I think our trouble is misunderstanding. Just as I may not know what it is to hate anything the way some

of you seem to hate me, so you may not know what it is to be the kind of an American I am. I am an American.

"I was brought to this country, ragged and starving, as a child of fourteen. I was educated here—such education as I could give myself while working in dark basements to earn my living as many of you may have done when you landed here. For I know that many of you did land here, poor and provided with nothing but faith and hope, even as I and my old mother, twenty-seven years ago. That is what makes us Americans, the burning faith that brings us here to start a new life when the old world has starved us out. I was born in Bohemia, a country that has been oppressed by Austria for centuries, that has always been in revolt, and that may well come out of this war an independent nation. But that does not matter. What does matter is that I am an American citizen, and that I have this citizenship, not because I was born here in security and comfort, but because I have won it. For me it is no commonplace, to be an American; it is the greatest privilege in a lifetime of hard work and dreaming toward this ideal. If you can turn and scourge me, when I have come into your nation with love and faith, and earned the right to be called one of you, then look into the homes of every state in this great West and Middle West. You will find thousands of men and women like me—who love America because they have had to struggle to belong to it. Who are the fathers and mothers of our beloved nation, if not people like me?

"Now that we are at war, I seek only one thing—to give whatever I can give for our common cause. I have no son or husband or brother to send to the front. I am alone in the world. The only contribution I can make is myself; and myself means my music. I thought in these terrible times, when we are all heavy-hearted, when each of us is

sacrificing his loved ones and straining every nerve to carry on, that I might bring a little peace, a little hope, a little faith to each tired and anxious heart. That is the only reason I am here. We must have spiritual food to replenish our souls, and for many of us that food is music."

She paused. The house remained, as it had been, tensely still.

"Now I am going to sing this concert," she continued, "because I know that there are men and women in this room who came here needing the solace of music. I believe in this with all my heart. If there are any who do not want to hear me sing, will those persons please leave the hall immediately, quietly and without further disturbance."

She stood as she had been speaking, firmly poised on the edge of the platform, tall and slender, with the light gleaming on the folds of her blue satin gown and striking up into her face, now pale and drawn with emotion, and into her eyes, more brilliant than ever with unshed tears. Her hands were clasped tight before her. Sam Rosenau sat at the piano swallowing sobs that rose to choke him, and Elsa deHaven and Dora, who had stood clinging to each other in terror just inside the doorway to the stage, were overwhelmed. But Lena stood, silent and magnificent, holding the crowd with the awesome power of her personality, while she waited for someone to take up her challenge and leave the hall. Not a soul moved. Every man and woman stood rooted to his place, with eyes fixed on Lena Geyer. She waited what seemed an hour—actually but a few moments—not moving limb or muscle. At last when she knew the completeness of their capitulation, she relaxed, and went gracefully back to her place in the bend of the piano.

Immediately there was a tornado of cheers. Not applause, not handclapping, but a terrific roar from thousands of

throats. The audience still stood, some even mounted chairs and waved hats and handkerchiefs, but all shouted and cheered and roared until she had to raise her hands and silently beg them to stop. Then they all took their seats again, and she finished her concert.

The episode reached the front pages of the nation's newspapers next day, and from that time on there was no more persecution of Lena Geyer. George caught a train as soon as Sam telephoned him the story, and met her in Chicago. He was beside himself with emotion and pride.

"Jesus Christ," he kept saying. "You're the greatest woman alive. Jesus Christ, this makes you the biggest woman in America. Jesus Christ."

But, though there was no more trouble of that kind, Lena Geyer's trials were not over. On the contrary, they were only beginning. It was Lena's way to live her life as she had chosen it—quietly, firmly, and consistently. She had elected a fierce kind of celibacy and a fierce projection of all her deep, feminine emotions into her art. She had made herself supreme by this means, but to those who knew her as well as George Phillips and Miss deHaven, there was cause for anxiety. So long as Vestri was present to supply the tremendous inspiration to justify her rigorous life, she was constantly being replenished and stimulated. After he left, as we have already seen, she was desolate and bereft and she worked on sheer nerve. Now she was too taut even to contemplate the possibilities of a more normal life. But what had been, for seven years, a successful sublimation of vast natural powers, turned into a rushing force which—dammed up—must eventually overwhelm her.

Lena had, in a remarkable way, voiced to three thousand strangers a truth from whose graver implications she had resolutely turned for many years. She had said in Kansas

City "I am alone in the world." And though she had never set any store by blood relations, and had found her relatives, while she had them, only a burden, it is nevertheless true that for a woman of rich and deep emotion and strong elemental feelings, the companionship of a spinster and of two or three devoted, brotherly men is no compensation for the relationships of a normal existence. She was not only alone in the world, she was alone in soul and spirit. She clung to Miss deHaven knowing that the mild, worshipping little woman could not exact any affection from her that would obstruct her work; but the rewarding completion of soul she had experienced in the love of the Duc de Chartres was constantly absent from her life after she parted from him.

It is true that the few people close to her sensed her desolation after the departure of Vestri, and made great efforts to lighten her unhappiness. Maestro Pizzetti was constantly with her, assuring her that this was only a transitory phase in the semi-tragic, semi-glorious career she had chosen, and that she would weather it successfully. George was jolly and affectionate and Rabelaisian, and believed he was helping her most by keeping her out of the Metropolitan, and singing in concert as much as possible. Miss deHaven could only be tender and solicitous as always. But none of these relationships supplied a quality of inspiration that had completely gone out of her life.

Lena had been surprised, in the preceding year, to receive a call in her dressing room from Henry Loeffler. She had seen him rarely, in the past five years, but always with pleasure. Since his wife's death he had withdrawn very largely from public activities, and though he retained his directorship at the opera, he had never had any contact with the artists. He had come to call on Lena after a *Tristan*, conducted by Vestri's successor, when she had sung beautifully

but had had, as well, to carry the whole performance. She was exhausted and was lying on the divan, pale and silent, when he was admitted. She was greatly surprised to see him. They had not needed to be close friends to sense the thought foremost in both their minds.

"Was there nothing you could do?" she had asked, and he had answered, "Nothing. Nothing on earth, Madame Geyer. I did everything in my power. I cabled, I offered to meet any possible condition. He never answered." Nor had Vestri ever communicated with Lena, or with anyone she knew.

She had changed the subject, and had felt, chatting quietly with Henry Loeffler, that he had been drawn to this unusual visit not so much out of a wish to see her as from a desire for some new and warmer human contact. He had looked much older: she had sensed that he was lonely. After sitting with her for a quarter of an hour, he had taken his leave, but as he was shaking hands, asked if he might call at the Plaza some afternoon. "My wife used to take so much pleasure in going there to tea with you," he had said rather wistfully; and Lena had assured him she would be delighted to receive him. From that time on, however, she had been away on tour the greater part of the time.

Now she returned at the beginning of December for her term at the opera. She could not believe that it was she herself, Lena Geyer, who regarded this work with so much indifference and distaste. Not only was there no conductor whom she liked but most of the colleagues she had admired and enjoyed singing with were also gone. Caruso and Amato were still there, so were Farrar and Hempel and Matzenauer, but in general the whole spirit of the place seemed to her to have become routine and second-rate. Lastly the repertoire for the season of 1917-1918, when Wagner and Strauss and

Beethoven were taboo, bored and irritated her. She was to sing in *Aida*, *Trovatore*, *Cavalleria*, *Carmen*, *Le Prophète*, and *Figaro*. Only the latter struck a spark of the old fire from her imagination; and even that production, revived the previous season, had been carried through in a way to make her weep for the memory of Mahler's in 1908.

This was the dreadful winter of 1918 when there was unprecedented cold, a coal shortage, meatless, wheatless, and sweetless days, war hysteria at every hand, endless war loan and Red Cross drives, and the influenza epidemic. Lena, who had never been afraid of anything in her life, became obsessed with fear of the disease and the idea that she or Miss deHaven or Dora would get it—perhaps all of them. She made them keep gauze masks in their purses and put them on whenever they rode in taxis, and did so herself. This was so unlike her that Miss deHaven knew she must be in an unnatural state of nerves even to have thought of such a thing. Also, for the first time since Miss deHaven had known her, she lost both her appetite and her energy; it was now Elsa, and not Lena, who had to drag them both out for their daily trek in Central Park. Lena began also to sleep badly, an affliction that she had never known before. She stubbornly refused to take any sedatives because she believed blindly that all such things harmed the voice.

Then she had two blows in succession. On a Thursday, late in February, Miss deHaven slipped on the ice getting out of a taxi, and broke her thigh-bone. She was taken to the hospital, put into a cast, and condemned to months in bed in a painful apparatus of weights and pulleys. On Saturday Luisa Pizzetti telephoned that the Maestro was ill. Lena was terrified, thinking he had caught influenza; she rushed to his house to find that he had, not influenza, but pleurisy, which at the age of sixty was equally alarming. Lena sent

for specialists, nurses, and every sort of necessary equipment. It was decided not to move Pizzetti to a hospital—he pleaded to be allowed to stay at home, for he was sure he was going to die. He did not die. But it was sheer will power, generated in the happenings of the next few days, that kept him alive.

All that week-end Lena shuttled back and forth between Maestro Pizzetti's house and the hospital where Elsa de-Haven was having a terrific battle with pain. Lena was always unnerved by sights of illness and suffering, but it never occurred to her to stay away from the bedside of either of the people she loved. She gave no thought to the rest she was losing on Elsa's account, or to the risk of infection she ran at the Maestro's house, where his illness had started with a severe cold that had now spread to both the children. And on Monday night she had to sing *Nozze di Figaro*. She had completely forgotten that she was billed, the only time in her life when anything had taken precedence over her work. When the opera telephoned early Monday morning to ask some question about the performance, she realized with a start of horror that the whole thing had slipped her mind. She insisted on making a visit to each of the patients in the morning, but Dora forced her to lie down for her rest in the afternoon. She did not sleep at all, and when the time came to leave for the opera house she was pale, nervous, and greatly upset at the absence of Elsa, who had ridden with Lena to every opera and concert she had sung in the past eleven years.

And in her dressing room, for the first time in over thirteen years, there were no flowers from Elsa. The poor little lady was under morphine most of the time and suffering so much as to forget the one inflexible rite of her life. To Lena this was a terrible, ominous symbol. Silently she began to dress, thanking God that Dora at least was left of all the

habits and associations that had made opera, and this particular opera, so dear. As was her habit, she was ready long before her call, and sat at her dressing table, silent and forlorn, staring into the mirror and thinking of everyone and everything connected with her beloved Contessa. She thought of Maestro Pizzetti, perhaps dying, who had first taught her the noble music; of Lilli Lehmann who had further perfected it, now incommunicado in the madness of wartime Germany; of Mahler dead in Vienna, under whom she had sung the part with such joy; and of Vestri who, though he had never conducted it for her, had listened time and again when she sang the two wonderful arias in concert, to tell her afterward that there could be no greater vocal art.

I was in my usual place that Monday night, thanking God that Mozart, who was of course just as German as Beethoven and Wagner, had had the grace to write Italian opera and to live so long ago that his nationality had little bearing on the modern maelstrom. The performance was distinctly superior to our average fare of the post-Vestri years, and the cast was excellent—Farrar and Hempel, Didur, deLuca, and Reiss, with the smaller parts adequately handled. But I know now that to Lena this production in comparison with other, greater, happier ones was wanting in a hundred respects—most of all in the indescribable joy and sparkle that she had known before. When the second act opened on her, standing in her exquisite laces and crinoline in her boudoir, I felt the same old unmistakable thrill, and as she began the *Porgi Amor* I knew at once that she was singing from even a pro-founder well of feeling than usual. When she rose slowly, evenly, and perfectly on the phrase *a mi lascia almen morir*, and held her A in a very passion of prayer, I responded acutely to her pitiful plea for death. Lena kept all the serene

classic style of those phrases, but she put feeling of the deepest sort into them, as well.

She was wonderful all through that act, exquisite in the trio and in the great sextette, which is the most brilliant part of perhaps the most brilliant opera ever written. She was the touch of perfection by which everything else was gauged. She acted enchantingly, and was given an ovation when she took a curtain alone after the act. For me the third act of *Nozze di Figaro*, even though it begins with my beloved duet, *Crudel! perchè*, is only an interlude leading up to the moment I love almost best of any in music—when the Contessa (always Lena, to me) comes on looking for Susanna and begins that incomparable recitative before the greatest aria. *E Susanna non vien?*, Lena sang, while the fiddles played their tender phrases, and sighed in her stead for the love she had lost and sought to regain. Then came the ineffably beautiful resolution to the tonic C, and I was lost in emotion when she began, *Dove sono, i bei momenti*. She was hardly into the centre of the phrase before I realized she was singing with a heartrending poignancy even I had never noted in her voice before—singing with her rich, faultless *legato*, but somehow, without a flicker or a tremor, conveying a quality of sadness that was too real to mask. How could I know then that she could hardly bear to voice the words that meant intolerably much to her—*Where are they, beautiful moments of sweetness and delight?* In the most perfect phrasing and richness of voice I ever heard from her, she finished the first part of the melody and came to the long pause; then she began the repeat.

She sang the first note. Then I realized with freezing blood that something terrible was happening. She stood, her mouth open, her eyes starting in horror from her head. The next note, the D, did not come. *She could not sing*. The

orchestra continued, of course; perhaps she had choked or gagged—such things happen—she would come in immediately. But Lena Geyer stood alone on the stage of the Metropolitan, turning green under her make-up, her mouth open like that of a childish idiot, and for the first time in her life, terror in her face. No voice came out. The orchestra must have played three or four bars before anyone grasped the enormity of the tragedy; then suddenly a high, small, frightful sound like the squeal of an animal that has been kicked, came from Lena Geyer. And I saw, just as the curtains rushed mercifully together, that she had fainted.

George Phillips was on the stage before they could pick her up. He and Setti carried her into her dressing room, where Dora, who had seen the whole thing from the wings, rose magnificently to the emergency. Her lips pursed together and tears streaming down her cheeks, she made no sound as she followed the doctor's orders, unfastening Lena's costume and relieving her of her stays. While the doctor was bending over her unconscious body with his stethoscope, there was a quiet knock at the door. Dora had kept out Gatti and everybody else in the company, but George at that moment saw Henry Loeffler whispering to the maid through the crack in the door. Mr. Loeffler beckoned to him. "My car is at this door," he said quietly. "My physician will meet us at my house. Can we carry her out just as she is?"

This was done, for the house physician agreed that she must be taken either to a hospital or to her home immediately. She was wrapped in several cloaks and carried out the Fortieth Street door, through which she had run so many times amid triumphal cheers. Not a word was said on the way up Fifth Avenue, but even while George sat there supporting her head and shoulders and feeling in a sense as if he himself had died, he realized that this man would not

have stepped into the emergency with such absolute authority if there were not some good and profound reason for his doing so.

Lena was lifted out of the motor and carried upstairs to a bedroom in Mr. Loeffler's house. She had not regained consciousness. A physician and a nurse were already there; before the night was out there were more physicians and more nurses, for she was desperately ill. Fear that she had had a stroke was soon allayed, but she lay in a coma for days. Long before she could recognize him, Maestro Pizzetti had rallied from his own illness, and in sheer determination pulled himself out of his sickbed and gone to hers. Miss deHaven was almost beside herself in the hospital, and talked to George on the telephone every half-hour, day and night. After a week, when Henry Loeffler had had the greatest specialists in consultation, and every diagnosis had been considered, the verdict was given to him and Pizzetti and George.

"A complete nervous collapse in its severest form," said the spokesman of the jury of doctors. "Temporary paralysis of the main motor centres, with corresponding depression of the heart and retardation of the other vital organs. The only treatment possible is complete rest, seclusion, and absolute quiet. My colleagues here will inform you of all the details and procedure."

Each of the three men asked a question:

"How long?" demanded George Phillips.

"Nobody can say," was the answer. "Perhaps months, perhaps—" A gesture.

"What was the cause?" asked Henry Loeffler.

"Exhaustion. Protracted strain. Shock. Until the patient is coherent or lucid and can bear further examination we cannot tell what the deep-lying cause may be. We can assure

you, however, that it must be a matter of years' standing."

Maestro Pizzetti leaned forward, hoarse and agitated, his eyes wet.

"*La voce?*" he pleaded, losing his English and pointing piteously to his throat.

The great physician tapped his pince-nez against his thumb-nail.

"My dear man," he answered crisply, "she will be fortunate if that is the only faculty she loses."

Chapter Twenty-two

MY WORLD also crashed when Lena Geyer collapsed. As I saw her fall, before the curtains closed completely, I started up from my seat and I remember crying "No! Oh, no!" All around me there were horrified exclamations and protests; nobody could grasp that this thing had actually happened. The conductor stopped the orchestra with the curtain, and the house remained in chilled suspense, exclaiming in muffled tones. I even heard, from two or three directions, people whispering "Is she dead?" and this possibility, which had not occurred to me, was a frightful shock. Presently the lights came on and I remember to this day the incongruity of the brilliant, crowded house in evening dress with the stricken faces of the people. A man stepped through the curtains to make an announcement. He spoke in such a sad and earnest tone that I pitied him in this tragic task.

"I most deeply regret to inform you that Madame Geyer has suffered a serious collapse," he said slowly, "and will be unable to continue the performance. With your permission we shall omit the Letter Duet and proceed with the opera beyond that point. Miss Susan Armstrong will substitute for Madame Geyer in the last act."

There was a wave of sighs and low exclamations of sorrow and pity. In a daze, oblivious of the people about me, I arose and made my way out of the balcony and slowly down the stairs. No such grief had ever touched me before; my heart pounded dully and my ears rang as I walked slowly up Broadway knowing that the world of my spirit and my

dearest dreams lay shattered in ruins. If I had known Lena Geyer then as I did later I would have obtained much consolation from being near her and in helping, however slightly, to bring her through those dreadful days. But I did not have this consolation. I had none. For ten years I had been content as a child and a youth to worship her for her music and to let that be the illumination of all my ideals. I had never dreamed of knowing her, any more than one would presume to friendship with a deity. And now, pacing through the snow and deaf to everything around me, I realized that I wanted nothing so passionately as for this woman to go on living—even if the miracle of her voice should be obliterated. Her personality, her soul, had been the basic inspiration of my life.

Actually, it was better for Lena's tragedy to happen swiftly as it did than for her to suffer any protracted threats to her supremacy. It was true to her character and to her art that she kept every facet of her perfection, singing on that February night with the whole beauty of her voice, until the very moment when Fate struck her down. There had never been a time in recent years when her singing had roughened, weakened, or failed in scope or quality, or when people could shrug or ask one another, "How old is Geyer, do you suppose?" So far as I know she had gone on singing in the same defiance of time and its inroads as that with which she had confronted ordinary human limitations. She was forty-two years old when she was stricken. For years she had grown increasingly critical and sensitive to her every tone and phrase, and the older she grew, the more scrupulous she became musically and vocally, lest anyone ever 'accuse her of resting on her reputation. If she had ever once found herself screeching or slurring, or swooping up to a note

instead of hitting it squarely on the head, she would have stopped singing in public long enough to correct herself by renewed study. She knew that at any time after forty she might begin to lose some element of her singing that would not perhaps even be missed by the ordinary public. She was always on her guard for this, and she made Maestro Pizzetti solemnly swear that if he ever heard her fail to meet her own exacting standard, however minutely, he would tell her so. She expected to go on singing so long, and only so long, as she felt she could sing perfectly. When she was no longer sure she could do so, she would retire. And she expected to know this years before anyone else did.

Thus it was really a mercy that she never had to weaken vocally or do a piece of poor singing before she vanished from the opera. If that had happened, no matter what the illness that was responsible for it, I am sure she would never have sung again. She would have been too proud to start, well over forty, to pick up a career that was already on the wane. In that way, violent as her collapse was, it saved her voice for the years when she did sing again; for she knew she had sung her best until the moment when sudden illness had silenced her. Once she was well again she could face her world fearlessly, knowing that nobody could say Geyer was on the downgrade anyway when she broke.

"Until the moment when I saw her crushed and helpless," Henry Loeffler told me, "I did not know what Lena Geyer meant to me. I had admired and respected her profoundly for years. I had enjoyed the sensation of warmth that came from every contact with her personality. But to me she was always primarily a voice, to which however I turned more than ever after my wife's death. I rarely failed to hear Madame Geyer sing. But I was too old"—he smiled at me

tenderly—"and too worldly, I suppose, to indulge in hero-worship like that of a young firebrand such as you.

"Once I had her under my roof it seemed the natural culmination of my years of devotion. Only, where the cause had been impersonal and artistic, the effect was intensely personal and so mundane as to be concerned chiefly with the routine of a long, serious illness. I had not hesitated to take Madame Geyer to my house, for in the very moment when it occurred to me, I sensed how completely alone in the world she was. I knew Miss deHaven, of course, and I knew of the accident that had befallen her, but disregarding that, I would still have felt that she was too feminine and helpless to cope with such a crisis.

"After the first ten days, Lena began gradually to emerge from the semi-coma in which she had lain. She was flat on her back in a darkened room, and I took the advice of the doctors who suggested that, when she first opened her eyes, she see someone who was very close to her. As Miss deHaven was in the hospital and remained there for six or eight weeks, Maestro Pizzetti took up residence in my house, in order to be there when Lena became conscious. All day long he would sit in a small chamber near her sickroom, provided with books and newspapers that he would pretend to read when anyone came near him; but I knew that actually he sat brooding and staring out of the window. Mr. Phillips came from his office four or five times a day, and at first the report was always the same: 'No change.'

"Finally one day the nurse saw Lena's eyelids open slowly, as if with the greatest effort, and close again immediately. This was the first sign of voluntary motion; until then she had not moved a muscle. We were greatly encouraged. Twelve hours later, when we were sitting outside her door, Pizzetti and I, the nurse came and beckoned to him. I went

in behind him and stood at a distance. Lena was lying in exactly the same position that she had for two weeks, her hands flat and helpless by her sides. But her eyes were open. Pizzetti leaned over and looked into them. There was some flicker of recognition, but when he spoke to her she did not respond. The shock had affected all her senses as well as her muscles; sight came back first, and the other faculties followed extremely slowly, over a long, anxious period of nearly ten weeks.

"By that time Miss deHaven was out of the hospital, but on crutches, and she could not easily motor from the Plaza to my house as many times a day as she wished. I confess it was with some reluctance, for I feared that her anxious solicitude would have a bad effect upon Lena, that I suggested that she, too, come and remain in my house during the critical period. Dora was already there: she had stayed since the night of the tragedy, and was proving something of a problem as the nurses would not allow her to care for her mistress and she was upset and rebellious.

"So Lena's whole entourage was, in effect, transferred to my care, and for the first time in many years my house and my days were full of active responsibility. I should have expected to find this somewhat wearing, but on the contrary, I felt great satisfaction in the victory we were slowly winning. I saw readily that Miss deHaven was of the greatest importance to Lena; once she was aware of her surroundings, she wished to have Miss deHaven and Pizzetti constantly near her. Yet she never spoke a word. Long after we knew she heard what was said to her, and long after she was able to swallow, to move her limbs feebly, and to taste the liquids she was fed, she remained completely silent. You may imagine the terror with which we watched this dreadful certainty manifesting itself.

"Lena did not know where she was. Sometimes she would slowly roll her head from one side of her pillow to the other, following the outlines of the walls and ceiling with her eyes, which were very dull. When she did this Miss deHaven would lean over her and softly say, 'You are in Henry Loeffler's house, Lena. We are all here. Maestro and Dora and I.' Lena would not seem to grasp this. So far she had recognized only Pizzetti and Miss deHaven and Dora; strangely enough, not George Phillips, and not myself at all. The doctor explained this as some sort of temporary hiatus in her process of association; an aphasia concerning everything that had entered her life since her arrival in New York in 1907. Everything subsequent to that date was strange. Her recognition consisted only of a certain expression in her eyes, and a way she had of turning one hand over, palm up, for her friends to put theirs in.

"Her physical condition remained so low that she was more or less helpless even after the doctors were sure she would ultimately recover. They would give us no encouragement, however, about her aphasia or her inability to speak, and had indeed warned us from the very beginning that we must be prepared for a possible permanent consequence of collapse. There were many hours when Miss deHaven and I gave in to utter despair, and poor George Phillips was like a haunted man. To my amazement, it was the oldest and feeblest of us all who, once he had recovered from the initial blow, refused to consider anything but a complete and brilliant recovery. This, of course, was Maestro Pizzetti. Each time Lena made a step forward he would lean over her, caressing her with his eyes, and whispering, '*Carina, cara figlia mia, brava, coraggio!*' as if trying to force his faith and intensity into her with his words and his eyes. Nothing seemed to make such an impression on her as

this passionate encouragement, and the first expression we saw on her face was the faint smile with which she answered one of the Maestro's pleas to her to be her best brave self.

"She had lost an alarming amount of weight and lay flat and wasted on the bed, horribly gaunt, with her cheeks sunken under the high bones and her mouth set in grim lines. One day when she was sleeping and I stood there looking at her, full of despair and grief, old Pizzetti came up beside me and whispered, 'I know what you are feeling and thinking, Signor. But do not be hopeless. She will get well. I have seen her like this before, Signor, believe me—worse than this—and I tell you, she will get well.'

"I do not really believe that in ordinary medical matters the will power either of the patient or of anyone else is more important than the technical details of the cure, though I have been told this is so. But in a purely nervous case, where the contributing causes are psychological and the main crisis caused by shock rather than by injury or disease, it is certainly not unreasonable to think that the patient's will and the atmosphere in which he lives are stronger factors in the cure than anything else. In fact we went so far, in Lena's case, as to believe that will power and nothing else could get her well. This was pumped into all of us by Maestro Pizzetti, and the doctors made no objection, though when Lena reached a certain point in her recovery they warned us that the stimulation of her will power by too much eagerness and encouragement could be overdone. They understood by then that one of the basic causes for her breakdown had been the terrific strain under which she had lived for years, holding herself to a certain rigid conception of life by the strength of the same will that we now wanted to reawaken. A genuine quality of relaxation, something she had never known, was extremely necessary for a safe

recovery. They told us to try to convince her that nothing was so important to her as complete peace.

"By the end of April she had gained enough strength to sit up slightly in bed, and to eat soft food, even to make a face of mischievous disgust at the custards and cereals they fed her. But she still remained totally silent, and she still showed that there were wide, scattered gaps in her memory. She now recognized George Phillips and me, but seemed to have trouble placing us in her mental panorama. Sometimes she smiled at me when I came into the room, and listened brightly to what I said, but at other times she would knit her brows and look distressed and puzzled by my presence. It was clear that some link was needed to patch up the breaks in her memory. I had better point out here, incidentally, that the doctors had thought it best for none of us ever to mention the opera, singing, or any related subjects to Lena, for fear that opening all this up might recall the crisis on the stage and throw her into a relapse.

"Therefore we used to rack our brains for things to talk to her about. You know that Lena, while a most intelligent woman, has never had any strong interest outside music, yet each of us tried to manufacture some subject of continuous interest. Miss deHaven would talk to her about Salzburg and Frau Lehmann's farm at Scharfling-on-the-Mondsee, coming in every day with a piece of manufactured news about the cows or the geese or the chickens or a new kitten or some such thing. George talked to her about food, sharpening her appetite with promises of the things she was to get at her next meal; he spent some time every day in consultation with the chef, learning the details of her daily diet. Maestro Pizzetti talked to her about his children, and if the children had not done some funny or mischievous thing each day, he would make one up to tell her. I used to read her lyric

poetry in which she seemed to take pleasure. She loved the poems of Wordsworth and Shelley, and particularly the sonnets of Shakespeare. I seldom read anything longer than a sonnet as it tired her to try to fix her attention. We were all feeling encouraged by that time, though there was no use hiding our real anxiety from one another. Even if we succeeded in making her well again, physically, what would the body of this woman be without her divine voice?

"It is a well-known fact that in these cases of trauma and shock, a second shock, related to the causal one, is often the direct instrument of recovery. Yet one cannot deliberately seek out such a shock. One might do fatal harm that way. We were aware of this whole possibility, but trusted the doctors when they said that time, and nothing but time, would supply the missing element to complete her recovery. One person, however, was the instrument of the accident that startled Lena into her complete self, and that was her maid, Dora. As I said, Dora had been a real problem during these interminable weeks. Shut out of the sickroom, except for a brief greeting twice a day, she was surly, quarrelsome, and extremely difficult. We were put to it to find things for her to do. She was glad to wait on Miss deHaven, but after her life of furious activity with her mistress, she was confounded by her comparative idleness now, and also she was blindly jealous of everyone who was near Lena more than she. Sometimes I saw her staring at the nurses with alarming hatred.

"Miss deHaven had taken it on herself to find things for the maid to do, and one of Dora's duties was to go to the Plaza every day, inspect the empty apartment, and gather all mail and messages and bring them to my house for Miss deHaven to open and answer. Lena was never shown any letters or given any messages, by the doctors' orders. They

wished her to exist like a vegetable, as they put it, absolutely out of contact with the world, until they felt sure she could slowly be led back into it. This was the sort of thing Dora could not understand. She thought they were deliberately trying to make an imbecile of her mistress. From time to time she attempted to sneak in and talk to Lena, but someone was always on guard. Then one day late in May, three months after Lena's breakdown, Dora went to the Plaza as usual to fetch the mail and there she found something that gave her courage to take a desperate chance. She found an envelope with an Italian postmark, much damaged by the censors, and stamped all over with government marks. She had seen the handwriting three or four times in her life, and she knew whose it was.

"If any of us had known what the woman was doing we would have dismissed her from Lena's service on our own responsibility, rather than countenance such a risk. But she was too shrewd and sly for us. She put the envelope in her pocket, and for four days she hid in cupboards and corners and bathrooms on the third floor of my house, waiting for a moment when there would be no nurse in Lena's room. This moment never came, for the patient was never left alone. On the fifth day of her vigil, however, Dora crept into the room just as the nurse on duty stepped into the bathroom with a pitcher. Like a flash, she darted across the room, locked the bathroom door, and crept to Lena's bed. Before the nurse had time to realize what had happened, Dora had whipped the letter from her pocket, shown it to Lena for a moment, and with trembling fingers opened it and drawn out what it contained. This she held before Lena's eyes, at the same time praying aloud in Czech to all the saints of the Bohemian church.

"What Dora had extracted from the envelope was an ordi-

nary penny-postcard photograph of Guido Vestri. She held it firmly so that Lena could see it, meanwhile continuing to pray, but suddenly she realized that there was something scrawled on the back of the card. She stopped praying and read aloud. He had written four words: '*Ancora Musica!—Sempre Amore.*' Dora watched Lena closely. Fear was getting the better of the maid, for the nurse had discovered herself locked in the bathroom and was beginning to make as much of a disturbance as she dared, without upsetting the patient. But, with her eyes riveted on the card, Lena remained silent as ever for several minutes. Then her face twisted as if she were in terrible agony; she rolled her head from side to side, and uttered a deep, strangled groan. It was the first sound from her since her illness.

"Dora now was overcome with fright. Terrified at what she might have done, she flew to the bathroom door, unlocked it, and as the nurse burst furiously into the room, she dropped to her hands and knees and scuttled under the bed, still clutching the post-card. Lena groaned again, a louder sound heard by Miss deHaven, who was limping to the room as fast as she could because of the noise the nurse had been making in the bathroom. Miss deHaven actually dropped her crutches and ran when she heard Lena. At sight of her, with her face still twisted and a look of terror in her eyes, she thought Lena had had another attack, and almost lost control of herself. But she managed to get down the hall to Maestro Pizzetti and me.

"By the time we all reached Lena, a complete transformation had come over her face. Miss deHaven burst into tears, and the nurse, between her rage at Dora, whom she could not chastise because of her preoccupation with Lena, and her fright, was also weeping. Lena lay just as she had before, but with a perfectly clear, lucid expression in her eyes, and a

look on her face of peace and contentment. She looked worn and white, but not ill. She turned her head slowly from side to side and gazed at us all. She opened her mouth and sighed loudly; for a moment we thought she would speak but she had not yet reached that point. She raised her hands, however, pointed to her mouth, and made a gesture of encouragement, much as a teacher will who is urging a pupil to sing louder or more freely. She was trying to tell us that we must not worry—she would speak to us soon. Then the shock and the effort took their sudden toll of exhaustion. She fell instantly asleep. Pizzetti dropped to his knees beside her.

“Needless to say Dora, within a few days, was the heroine of the household, but not before the doctor had explained to her that she might have killed her mistress, or incapacitated her permanently. Naturally the maid was not much impressed by anything that the doctor said. She believed that she and Saint Ludmila had turned the tide, and that American science was nonsense by comparison. She did promise, however, not to talk to Lena about anything at all, for Miss de-Haven finally managed to convince her that Lena must not be forced, but allowed to drift back to her normal self, which she was still very far from being. It was many days before she tried to speak a word, but we saw that the gap in her memory covering the years of her American career had closed up, and that she had no difficulty in identifying all of us at all times, and in placing us properly in relation to herself. She understood now that she was in my house, though we tried to avoid discussion of how this had come about. We did not want to recall that night to her.

“The weather was unseasonably warm for early June, and it was becoming difficult to keep Lena comfortable in bed. She was moved to a chair for an hour each morning and

afternoon, and she seemed content to sit there looking westward over the green trees of Central Park and watching the pigeons flying around the windows. The nurse put crumbs on the sills to attract them there, and they gave Lena great pleasure. She looked so wistful, sitting in her chair gazing at the birds and the sky, that I inquired of the doctor whether we might consider moving her to my country house at White Plains. There she could spend most of her time in the garden, and have all the benefit of the sunshine and air. The doctor agreed that we might make the move, and I ordered everything to be prepared. Lena was growing visibly stronger now; she had of course not stood up, or made any physical effort, but she used her hands easily and co-ordinated perfectly. She had still not spoken but she repeatedly made gestures almost as if to indicate that her silence was voluntary and that she would speak to us in her own good time. This was not really the case, for she had resumed the use of each of her faculties as soon as she had been able; but we saw that she herself was aware of the nature of her illness and was waiting for the return of her voice just as we were.

"On the morning that we were to drive to White Plains the nurse prepared Lena for the ride, and wrapped her in light, warm garments. None of the bustle of packing had been allowed to penetrate the sickroom, but one small suitcase, in which the nurse had put immediate necessities, was standing on a chair. When Lena saw this a most eager gleam came into her eyes, and just at that moment George Phillips entered the room; for he had begged to be one of the men to carry her out. He came up to her chair, held out his arms, and said, 'Come on, Lena, old girl. We're going to trek.'

"At that word, with its special meaning for her, Lena's face lighted and her nostrils dilated. Her chin trembled for

a moment and she licked her lips nervously. We stood rooted in suspense, watching her.

"‘Yes,’ she said suddenly in a hoarse voice. ‘Trek!’"

"Phillips and I stared at each other, careful not to excite her by too much emotion. But the tears were rolling down his cheeks and down mine too. Nobody could have helped that. He put his hand on her shoulder as he stood beside her, and looked at me.

"‘By Jesus,’ he whispered, ‘we win!’"

The months that followed in Henry Loeffler's beautiful home at White Plains were an exceedingly slow but sure climb back to health for Lena. Nothing happened quickly. Speech came hard at first, and tired her. She did not take a step until July, and then only a step; the next day, another. She spent most of her time lying in an invalid chair in a section of the garden that Henry Loeffler had arranged especially for her. This is walled with a high privet hedge and laid out in rose beds, with a fountain in the middle and a willow tree on each side. Under one of these trees they placed Lena's chair, with a canopy over it that was moved with the sun; and near it were feeding perches for birds, for she loved to lie and watch them.

The whole "family" did not move to the country. Pizzetti and George stayed in town, but one or the other came daily for a short visit. Miss deHaven and Dora, of course, were fixtures. Henry Loeffler had learned to accept them unreservedly, and it was a strange picture indeed to see Miss deHaven occupying a permanent place at his table. But she had come a long way since the days of her narrow New York girlhood. She had lived life, in spite of her spinsterhood, in the midst of more vitality and color than any of

her contemporaries who had married and taken their places as leaders of society.

It was an anomalous situation, however, for her and her host and for Lena Geyer as well. Nobody knew exactly why Henry Loeffler had stepped into the emergency on that dreadful February night, but all were content that by doing so he had certainly saved Lena's life. In the months that he had cared for her and for her whole peculiar entourage, opening his formal, magnificent home to Pizzetti and George Phillips and the willful Dora, he himself had changed. His ageing look, which for a time had been accentuated by his anxiety over Lena, began to disappear. His wistful expression, which had so touched her ever since the death of his wife, was slowly replaced by one of profound tenderness and warmth that appeared whenever he looked at Lena. His formal precision of manner lost none of its elegance but much of its coolness; he smiled oftener, he listened to the talk of George Phillips and Pizzetti with keen interest. Though he had been busy all his life with the responsibilities of his bank, during the critical period of Lena's illness he turned over his duties to his eldest son; and once having done that, he shed the whole burden permanently. He preferred to stay near Lena, at first in case of emergency, and later because he loved to be with her. In short, he was happy, and having once found such happiness he was old enough and wise enough to know better than to let it slip through his fingers.

As Lena emerged from the dark valley of her illness it could be seen that she would not be permanently ravaged by the experience, at least not in looks and attitude. Of her voice, nobody yet dared to speak. It was enough that her speaking voice came back gradually, low and clear and resonant as always. The rest, if it ever came, would be a long way off; and everyone forced himself to realize that it might

never come again. Her physical appearance was encouraging, however. Her skin, which had always looked young for her years, resisted wrinkles and lines; her hair had hardly a thread of gray, and her hands remained smooth and white, though shockingly bony now. Her eyes grew clear again and kept the new look of calm and peace that had entered them on the day when Dora performed her miracle. Only in energy and in her reactions was Lena still markedly deficient. She could walk only a few steps, she made no physical effort of any sort, and she lived on the closely restricted schedule of an invalid. She tired very easily, and needed enormous amounts of sleep. It was as if she were subconsciously trying now to regain every ounce of the strength and force and fire that she had so lavishly poured into the opera houses where she had made herself immortal.

By October, when it was growing too cold to stay much longer in the country, the question arose of how she should spend the winter. Miss deHaven had expected her to insist on going back to her own apartment at the Plaza. But Lena's instincts were too sound for that. She knew that so long as she was not the woman who had imbued that place with its reason for being, she would only jeopardize her chances of restoring her identity by forcing herself into its atmosphere. Of course the pathetic pretense of avoiding mention of opera and music around Lena had long since been abandoned, and she could contemplate the whole subject now with remarkable resignation and calm. Whether she ever declared to herself "I have lost my voice," nobody can know; but she managed to leave the question suspended, and to show not the slightest sign of rebellion or impatience. This, amazed her intimates, for Lena was always an impatient person, and everyone dreaded the inevitable time when she would begin to be restless and talk of singing once more. In some way

nature was taking care of her, and keeping her so subdued physically that she could not make the effort to contemplate working. Indeed, she made no effort of any kind.

Henry Loeffler supplied a further solution for her interrupted life by taking her and Miss deHaven to California for the winter. He had a house at Santa Barbara, which he had not occupied since his wife's death, and for the journey he borrowed a private car from the president of a railroad of which he was a director. When he proposed this trip to Lena she looked at him for a long time without speaking. She was lying in her chair in the garden, wrapped in blankets and robes, with a light shawl over her head. She herself, in the recent weeks of her recovery, had gone farther than her friends in voluntary avoidance of plans and discussions of her future. She had deliberately adopted a simple, childlike attitude of passivity, letting everyone else make decisions. When Mr. Loeffler proposed the California trip she studied his face for a time, shading her eyes with her large hand, and presently she said, "Henry, how can I let you do these things for me?"

"I have not done anything important," he said quietly.

"My life," she began checking off on her fingers. "My reason. My friends, who worship you. God only knows how much money. Perhaps—even my——"

He put his hand over hers and silenced her. "Lena, you must not think in these terms," he said. "By some fortunate fate, I was privileged to be of use at a critical time. Actually, I feel very much in your debt."

"You—in mine?"

"Yes. This experience has put new strength into all of us, my dear. Such things happen rarely and everyone emerges from them with a new faith in the mysterious ways of God. We have not yet reached the end of this road. Surely you

would not deprive me of the joy of being near when you are perfectly well and strong again?"

Thus matters were simple enough between Lena and Henry Loeffler; but the person really affected by the new order of things was Miss deHaven. I asked her how she had felt about the changes and she answered me frankly. "Naturally my feelings were mixed," she wrote me. "On the one hand I was more appreciative than anyone of what Mr. Loeffler had done for Lena and thus for me. On the other, I only had to see the two of them together to draw the natural conclusion about the future. Lena was forty-three, Henry fifty-five. He seemed younger than when we had first known him ten years before, and Lena of course was a different woman entirely. All that winter in Santa Barbara we took it for granted that her career was over. She was very gentle, quiet, and subdued. She could spend hours in a chair in the garden surrounded by every lovely thing that grows, looking out from our hilltop over the Pacific, and simply existing, waiting for time to pass—quite unlike the real Lena. Mr. Loeffler would sit in the garden with her, reading to her, or chatting, very often not even speaking. They would just sit in two basket-chairs, side by side, and seem absolutely at peace.

"I might very easily have felt shut out and unwanted in this growing idyll of middle-aged love. But you know how frank Lena always was with me, and I with her. I had tried to back out of the California trip, but Lena refused to listen to me. She said she needed me, and when she asked me what I would do if I were left alone I'm afraid I answered by bursting into tears. So she shrugged and said, 'You see? Don't be a jackass.' Nevertheless I was not perfectly comfortable. I disliked the idea of being Henry Loeffler's guest. I could always have the deciding word in financial matters

with Lena, but I could not very well go to Mr. Loeffler and offer to pay my board, or my transportation on the private car. I asked her to speak to him and she said he answered by putting his finger on his lips and shaking his head like a Mandarin.

"So I found myself in the peculiar position of keeping house for the three of us in Santa Barbara. Somebody had to do it; Mr. Loeffler had decided not to bring his staff from New York, and yet we all liked to be comfortable. Anyway, I would have gone mad without something to do. The cessation of all Lena's strenuous activity let me down, in a way, almost as much as it did her and Dora. We were a queer household, I can tell you. I was thoroughly conscious of Mr. Loeffler's feeling about Lena and of its probable consequences, and it made my own future a problem that hung on me like a millstone. Then if you ask me if I was jealous, I must honestly admit that I was. I had been warned time and again that to base my entire life upon a devoted friendship with a famous and powerfully attractive woman could only result in personal tragedy for me, and I had tried all these years to arm myself against this possibility. So long as Lena was singing I knew that no man or woman could become as intimate with her and as personally important as I, but when we all actually believed that she would never sing again I had to realize how natural it would be for her to accept some substitute for the broken mainspring in her life. I could not be the substitute because I was already part and parcel of her existence, and Lena was bigger and warmer and freer and more expansive than I. She had to have more.

"Henry Loeffler is certainly the most sensitive, subtle, wise, and tactful man I ever knew. He understood every detail of this situation even better than Lena or I. He was not greedy and impetuous as a young man might have been. He had

come into a kind of mature peace and warmth that he had never expected to enjoy. He radiated contentment, and of course he made us feel the same way. And we had a good time, the three of us. Lena still loved to play pinochle, and we taught Henry and made him play. Of course he was a wizard at anything like that. We used to go on long drives up the Camino Real, or inland to the Ojai Valley, driving through orange and lemon ranches and stopping to buy fruit where they had it for sale along the road. Lena had a passion for the smell of the orange trees, and she used to lean back in the touring car with her eyes closed and the sun beating on her face, and draw long, deep breaths of the marvellous, fragrant air. Sometimes when she did this there would be that passionate, ecstatic expression on her face that she used to have while she was singing, and we never saw it at any other time.

"Naturally it was not a surprise when Lena came into my room one night in April—and what a perfect night it was—I can still remember the moonlight outside on the garden, and the smell of the pittasporum and the lemon blossoms. She curled up on the foot of my bed. She had on a long white velvet wrapper, and her hair was loose on her shoulders. I put a pillow behind her back and the quilt over her knees and she sat and looked at me for a long time, with her eyes shining with tenderness. I knew what she was going to say. I waited, and presently it came.

" 'Henry has asked me to marry him, Elsa,' she said in a very low tone. I feared somehow to ask her what she had answered, thinking I knew. But she went on. 'I told him it depended on you,' she said.

" 'On me?' I said, aghast. 'Not on—?' Somehow we never mentioned her voice in so many words. On the rare occasions when we referred to it, the tacit implication was

enough. She knew what I meant now and she shook her head slowly.

"‘God knows,’ she murmured. ‘I’ve been all over that with Henry. If some further miracle happens to me we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it. But you are the main question now. Elsa, I won’t marry Henry if you leave me.’

"‘I was deeply moved, and terribly bewildered. All sorts of questions rushed through my mind. I poured them out to her. ‘How does Henry feel about this?’ I asked; and ‘How could I do this?’ and finally, ‘Do you want to marry Henry, Lena?’

"‘She leaned forward and looked at me very earnestly. ‘Henry wants to marry me,’ she said. ‘He knows all about my life. He knows what he’d be undertaking. He even knows that I’d never have considered this if I weren’t—a—wreck now. I told him I’d feel as if I were taking advantage of his devotion because I’m down on my luck. But he won’t listen to that. The love of an older man can be the most beautiful, unselfish thing in the world, Elsa. He means security, too, and peace. I need that now. They’ve shorn my locks, darling.’

"‘But Lena,’ I protested, ‘why did you drag me into it?’

"‘Elsa, let’s not go into that. You know why. Suppose you left me—I’d be a cripple. And what would become of you?’

"‘I was not too proud to admit that my heart would break. But I insisted it was a dreadful thing to saddle a man with an old maid hanger-on of his wife’s. ‘And you know, Lena,’ I added, ‘it would not be easy for me. I don’t like to bring up a question of position—pride—that sort of thing. But it would be there.’

"‘I know it would,’ she said passionately, seizing my hands in hers, ‘and that’s why I’ve put this up to you. I don’t have

to tell you that Henry is a dear, the gentlest soul on earth. You know he'd not only accept this, he'd welcome it as part of having me. No, the sacrifice is up to you. I'm asking you to do something fantastic, simply for my sake. I have a colossal cheek, I know. You've given up the whole first half of your life to me and now I'm asking for the rest of it, without being able to compensate you as I could before.'

" 'I don't want any compensation,' I said. 'Don't talk that way. I want you to be happy because that's the only happiness there is for me. I'll try it, Lena, that's the most I can say. If I promise to live in Henry's house for your sake and make the best of life like that, will you promise me something?'

"She nodded. 'Promise you will never let me come before Henry,' I said. 'Some time something will come up that will force you to choose. Never let me come between you. I could not take that responsibility.'

"She promised, most earnestly, and I knew she meant it. We talked for a long time, and after she left me and went back to her room I lay wide awake the rest of the night. The next evening after Lena had been driving alone with Henry, and I knew she had told him, he came out on the terrace where I was pouring the coffee after dinner and lifted my hand and kissed it. Neither of us said anything, but I felt that an agreement had been sealed between us. It was going to be no easier for Henry Loeffler to have me than for me to live with him. But Lena, sitting in the shadow of the big pepper tree, gave a tearful sort of laugh and said, 'Poor Henry, you're marrying both of us. Me because I'm helpless and Elsa because she's not.'

"They were married on the fifteenth of May, 1919, on Lena's forty-fourth birthday, in the parish house of the Mission, by one of the priests. I had never known Lena to

express a religious conviction and I had expected their marriage to be a civil ceremony. But when the arrangements were being made, Lena said, 'Once a Catholic, always a Catholic. I'm a poor specimen of one, but I won't feel married if there isn't a priest.' I was the only friend there; the other witnesses were monks from the Mission. Lena wore a pale gray chiffon dress and a big Leghorn hat with a wreath of flowers on it and carried a mass of orange blossoms. She looked young and lovely and calm. Henry's face was like that of a saint; he looked at Lena so tenderly, and even while I wept for the loss of her voice which had brought this all to pass, I realized she was at peace. Immediately after the ceremony I left for New York to open the White Plains house—from now on I was the whole domestic side of Henry Loeffler's wife. She paid no more attention to such details than she ever had. But while I was packing for the trip East, she came into my room with a bunch of keys.

"'Elsa,' she said, 'will you please go to the bank when you get home and take all the boxes out of the safe-deposit vault and arrange for Cartier to ship them to Paris—to their owner?' She was referring to the jewels given her by Louis de Chartres."

Chapter Twenty-three

"I MARRIED Lena Geyer," Henry Loeffler told me, "realizing that the road ahead was not perfectly clear, nor the future predictable. Without saying much about it to her, I had gone into the question of her voice very minutely with all the doctors who had been on her case. Most of them believed that the loss of her voice was part of a general collapse, not that the collapse was a shock caused by losing the voice. Singing being a physical faculty like sight or the ability to walk, it was perfectly possible for it to return unimpaired as everything else had. On the other hand, there was this chance that she had actually lost her singing voice and that everything else had been consequential; if such was the case she would never sing again. All the doctors and Giulio Pizzetti, who knew more about the voice than anyone, impressed on me the absolute necessity of her not attempting to sing a note until she was so strong that one could not detect a trace of her illness. They said this recovery of strength would take well over a year. But if I had had any misgivings about her obedience, they were dispelled the day we left for California. Maestro Pizzetti was at the train to see her off, of course, and just before he said good-bye he leaned over her and looked straight into her eyes and said this: 'Lenzka is not to sing one note, not a note until I give permission.' She nodded solemnly and said, 'Si, Maestro.' I sensed that the meaning underlying this exchange was deeper than it appeared.

"When we returned from California after our marriage,

there was such a reunion as I had never seen. Lena had asked to have her apartment at the Plaza opened and put in order, and at the same time she told me, with great diffidence, that if I could consent, she would prefer not to live in the Fifth Avenue house. I asked her why and she said that it would always bring home to her her inadequacy as a successor to Minnie. Also it had forbidding associations for her after her illness there. And lastly, she said, she had a blind feeling that if she were ever to sing again, she must keep part of her own personal identity, part of the Lena Geyer who had nothing to do with me or our life together. So she suggested that we make our headquarters at White Plains, and use her apartment at the Plaza for our town residence; we could add some rooms to her suite to accommodate me and the enlarged household. I consented to this, and I turned over the Fifth Avenue house to my son Paul, who had also succeeded me in everything but title at the bank. So it was to the Plaza that we returned from the California journey, and what a reception we found there!

"Maestro Pizzetti and George Phillips met us at the train and only their desire not to tire Lena kept their spirits in check. Pizzetti seemed to have gained markedly in strength in the seven months we had been gone, and I was surprised to see him looking so robust. Phillips told me that the Maestro had spent the whole winter taking care of himself, 'like an athlete in training,' he said, tapping his forehead but at the same time giving me the most significant of looks. Phillips himself, I could see, was vibrating with suppressed eagerness of the sort he showed only in relation to Lena, but we all knew that our common unspoken thought must be held in abeyance.

"Elsa and George and Pizzetti had decorated the apartment with garlands of smilax and huge bouquets of flowers,

and on a table in the centre of the drawing room they had piled the letters and telegrams of congratulation for our marriage—thousands of them, I suppose. The board of directors of the Metropolitan, together with the management, had sent us a huge silver tray with the history of Lena's Metropolitan career engraved on it, and the signatures of all the donors and of her colleagues at the opera. She was very proud of that. We had a wedding supper with a prodigious cake that was a combination of the usual bridal motifs together with all the musical ones that could be crowded on. Lena would not cut it until she had telephoned to Luisa Pizzetti and made her bring the children to join us—Pizzetti had not included them for fear of overtiring Lena. It was a simple and child-like celebration, and the most sincerely heartfelt I ever witnessed, for there was nobody there to whom Lena's happiness was not of greater importance than anything else in the world. But what pleased her most of all was the cable that was delivered while we were all there at supper—a message from Lilli Lehmann, who had just received Miss deHaven's news of our marriage. With this in her hand, Lena looked at Maestro Pizzetti with a face full of eagerness and inquiry. He smiled at her, but slowly raised and shook his forefinger in warning. We all sensed what was passing between them.

"Pizzetti came to me after we were settled and asked me to keep Lena amused and distracted during the summer. 'She is beginning to be restless in the throat,' he said graphically, 'and I don't want her to try anything for some months yet.' I was struck by the cool way in which he took his direction and mastery of this situation for granted. Three years before when Lena was at the height of her powers he had receded to the position of an adoring old parent, proud and sentimental, but now that she was in trouble he stepped for-

ward in an authoritative way that was a revelation to me. One of Lena's strongest characteristics was her ability to obey any valid command relating to her voice. Through the next few months she continued to gain in physical strength and to fortify herself by exercise, first taken very lightly and gradually increased until by early fall she was once again making her daily and somewhat formidable 'treks' with Elsa deHaven.

"Elsa showed her remarkable insight, during this period, by asking me one day whether I, in my heart of hearts, wanted Lena to sing again.

" 'The answer would be no,' I said, 'if I thought I could make Lena happy by offering her anything as my wife that would compensate her for not singing. But if Lena finds her voice unimpaired, I could not dare to interfere with her using it if she wants to. It would be like strangling her.'

"That ominous 'if' hung over us heavily. 'If' Lena found her voice unimpaired! The end toward which we were conserving and building her strength now was not to make her strong so that she could sing, but to give her a reserve to prevent a second collapse in case she found she had permanently lost her voice. By mid-winter she had regained all her strength, and really seemed her old self. We had moved into town from White Plains for the cold months, and we were living a pleasant life. Lena had never before had time to go to the theatre or to make social contacts with interesting people. She had chosen to know almost nobody because comparative solitude was easiest for her when she was singing. But now solitude had no special virtue and she was quite happy to go out with me occasionally to dine with friends and to attend the theatre. She looked lovely. Her illness had left her slightly more slender than she had been before, and she was so rested that her eyes and skin were as clear as a

girl's. She had a beautiful figure, with broad shoulders and a magnificent deep chest and throat. Designers loved to dress her because she lent importance to everything she wore. She walked like one of the graces, yet with a rather more vigorous stride than the typically feminine beauty. That stride was the last of her physical characteristics to return after her illness—all during her convalescence she had moved with short, uncertain steps that seemed to remind us of her tragedy whenever she so much as crossed a room.

"Pizzetti said nothing to me about when she might try to sing, and I knew he was biding his own good time. George Phillips came in once a day to see Lena—his office was nearby in Fifty-seventh Street, and he liked to drop in either at lunch time or for a whiskey-and-soda at five o'clock. But he too, I could see, was sedulously avoiding the real question in his mind.

"One afternoon in February I was returning to the Plaza about four-thirty, and when I let myself into the foyer of our apartment I found Elsa standing like a ramrod beside the door of the drawing room, which was closed. When she saw me she clutched my arm and put her finger on her lips. Her eyes were dilated and she was breathing very quickly. Before I had time to question her she closed her fingers like a vise on my arm and I, too, suddenly gasped. An arpeggio, slowly and perfectly phrased in Lena's truest, clearest tones, flowed through the closed door. I could hardly believe this. Now it was my turn, in my excitement, to clutch Elsa. 'Four times,' she whispered to me hoarsely, 'all perfect.' Maestro Pizzetti—it was, of course, he—struck the next chord, a half-tone higher. With our hearts in our throats we waited. Again it came, faultless and glowing. Another half-tone. And another. Each time Elsa and I waited more tensely, not daring to believe that what we

heard was real. Then we heard a sharp click as Pizzetti closed the lid of the piano and his voice, hoarse with emotion, saying, 'Enough. No more today, *carina*.'

"We could not contain ourselves longer and we burst into the drawing room. Pizzetti was sitting at the closed piano wiping his eyes with his handkerchief, and beside him with her hand on his shoulder stood—*Lena Geyer*. By this emphasis I mean that the docile, gentle, subdued woman, to whom we had already grown accustomed, had vanished. Radiating fire and force, her face suffused with light, the old Lena stood before us. I would not have been human if I had not felt, in that moment, as if my bride had been snatched away and this unapproachable goddess put in her place. But the atmosphere in the room was electric with joy. There was no sense of surprise emanating either from Lena or from Pizzetti. He looked up at her with an expression of the tenderest love and pride, and she looked down at him with her nostrils trembling and her eyes sparkling. Elsa rushed to Lena and threw her arms around her. 'Thank God,' she choked. 'Oh Lena!' Then she looked deeply into my wife's eyes and her face grew taut and pale. 'You knew all the time!' she exclaimed slowly.

"Lena patted her shoulder as if Elsa were a small child. '*He* knew,' she said, indicating Pizzetti. 'But it's the same thing.' Then she turned to me. 'Henry dear,' she said, taking my hands, 'can you stand it? Will you hate to have me back in harness?'

"Just then the door flew open and George Phillips rushed in. I did not at the time stop to wonder how he knew what was going on. I have thought about it since, and believe Dora must have telephoned him, for she had certainly been listening, just as Elsa and I were. Anyway, Phillips was breathless, and without a hat or overcoat. He had obviously

run all the way from his office. He glanced sharply from Pizzetti, still sitting at the piano, to Lena who had one arm about Elsa and one about me. We were all feeling pretty emotional by that time, though very quiet. It was George who broke the tension. That tight, shrewd, waspish little chap went over to a chair in the corner and sat down in it and had hysterics. The tears poured down his cheeks and he sobbed like a woman. Far from joining him in his outburst, we all turned to bringing him round, and it was George, rather than Lena, who received the restoratives and the solicitude. She walked up and down the room with her hands behind her back, saying, 'You big booby. You big fool.' She actually did not see why we were all so overcome by surprise and relief. She had never really doubted that her voice would come back, and this had been the secret of her gentleness and her resignation. If she had believed that she would never sing again, I think suicide would not have been too extreme a resort for her."

I, David Freeman, was in the outside world during the years of Lena Geyer's disappearance, and a bleak and dreary world it was. The breakdown and death of Caruso occurred during this period and that tragedy hovered over every inquiry for Lena Geyer. For nobody knew what had happened to her. Everyone took it for granted that she had permanently lost her voice, and there was much gossip and speculation as to the cause. She was said to have lost her mind, to have become a gibbering idiot shut up in an institution, to have been completely paralyzed. Though the public memory was short, Lena Geyer had cut far too deep a groove in it to be forgotten; yet by 1920 she was spoken of as if she had sung twenty, rather than two years before. It was about then that I first went to George Phillips' office, as I related

earlier, on some business of my own, and found him at odds with the whole world. But he too was peculiarly evasive when I mentioned Lena Geyer, and this of course confirmed the worst rumors I had heard; I thought she really had become a permanent wreck. He knew how I felt about her and he was perfectly willing to sit and listen to me rave, though he must have regarded me as a babbling schoolboy. He merely told me she was married to Henry Loeffler, and in fair health.

Imagine my emotions, then, when I opened a letter from Phillips and Hofheim's office one January morning in 1921, to find two tickets inside. George occasionally sent me seats for his artists' recitals and I looked at these idly to see what they were. I could not believe my eyes: here was "LENA GEYER" and a date in February printed on the blue cardboard. I was at the telephone in two leaps. I asked Phillips what this meant, whether it was a cruel joke. "Come on down to the office and I'll tell you," he said. When I got there the place was like a different world; the stenographers had ear-to-ear grins, all the phones were ringing at once, and George sat in his private office with his feet on the desk, wreathed in cigar smoke.

"For Christ's sake," he shouted at me, "what kind of a jackass do you think I am? Joke about a thing like this? Huh!"

Then he told me a little of what had happened. But only a little. He said, "Lena Geyer is going to sing on the sixth of February and she is all there, every bit of her. See? And I'm going to handle this stinking gossip my own way. I'm not going to announce this concert until a week before the date. I've had Carnegie Hall for that afternoon ever since last spring, only I've never let on who I had it for. And I ain't going to let on. I don't want reporters and sob-sisters

and the Met and every other yapping poodle in New York running after her."

"The Met?" I repeated doubtfully. "Isn't she going back to the Met if she's all right again?"

"No she's not," he snapped. "That God-damn opera singing ground the heart and soul out of her and look what happened. Now she's going to sing my way, by Jesus."

I promised George I would keep the secret and I watched his tactics with intense interest. Not a word about Lena Geyer appeared in the papers. It was the middle of January; it was the end of January. All the other managers were advertising their concerts for the coming month in bold-face type. Not a word from George. Finally in the music section of every Sunday paper on January thirtieth, there was a moderate-sized advertisement, with plenty of white space. It read:

PHILLIPS AND HOFHEIM ANNOUNCE THE
RETURN OF LENA

GEYER

SONG RECITAL, SUNDAY AFTERNOON
FEBRUARY 6TH, 3 P.M.

CARNEGIE HALL

All that day my friends came rushing to me full of questions, excitement, and suspense. Most of them were incredulous. All wanted to know what I knew about it. I told them nothing—only that she was going to sing and that if Lena Geyer was ready to sing she must be all right. Tuesday afternoon George telephoned that the house was sold out. The rest of that week there were small notices in the papers,

and some billboards outside Carnegie Hall, announcing "Return of Lena Geyer. House entirely sold out."

I had never had such good seats for a concert in my life, and I suppose I was in them, with a friend, almost half an hour too soon. There were seats on the stage, and as many standees in the back of the house as the fire department would permit. The boxes were crammed, with extra guests standing in the rear of each, and the balcony where I was accustomed to sit looked like a beehive in swarm. The house literally tingled with anticipation and excitement. Such being the nature of humanity, a considerable proportion of the audience had come in sheer malicious curiosity, expecting to sneer, shrug its shoulders, and walk out to tell the world that poor old Geyer, at forty-five, was trying to stage a come-back. The larger part of the audience, however, was made up of the people who had worshipped her unfalteringly for ten years, and who had mourned her like a beloved deity when she disappeared.

In my mind's eye I can see her as George described her in the greenroom before the concert, calm of manner and even more royally in possession of herself than ever before, as if her long submission to fate had strengthened and reinforced her. She sat quietly by the table, surrounded by Henry and Elsa and George and Dora and Maestro Pizzetti, who, though he had every trait of an excitable Italian in more trivial moments, could be as imposingly quiet as an archbishop if he felt the occasion demanded it. Henry Loeffler and Miss deHaven did not leave to go to their box until Lena had started to the stage, and they took their places in the midst of the uproar launched by thirty-five hundred people the moment the door opened for Lena Geyer.

She came to the front of the stage with her old free, rhythmical stride and stood there holding out her hands

while the audience cheered. Between bursts of handclapping I studied her through my glasses. I could not get enough of the sight of her face. I could hardly realize that it was so young, so rested, and so radiant. Before she opened her mouth I felt perfectly sure that her voice would be its whole glorious self. The audience could hardly be quieted for her to begin. Sam Rosenau must have tried three or four times to play the first introduction and each time somebody would start another salvo of applause and cheers. Lena was glowing. She wore a simple dress of heavy white satin, with long sleeves and a low, square neck; she wore a necklace of emeralds and a small white turban with a bird-of-paradise trailing over her left shoulder. She looked as natural and as comfortable on that stage as if she had never had a moment of grief or trouble in her life.

And her program! She deliberately set out to make a program of everything her audiences had always loved best. She began with *O Sleep*, of Handel, and *With Verdure Clad*, Haydn. Then two Mozart songs—not arias, I was relieved to see, feeling that her horrible experience might have left some cruel scar. The songs were *Ridente la Calma* and *Die Verschweigung*. After this first group the ovation was so wild that I knew, when she came out for her first encore, that she was going to do something extraordinary. And she did. She sang *Un Moto di Gioia!* This is the aria that was written as a supplement to *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and it surely is the essence of its lovely title. But the courage, and the symbolism of what she did—to choose music from the very opera in which she had collapsed, and to sing it—a word of joy—to mark her reunion with her public! There were cries of delight as she finished, and not many dry eyes that I could see. And she sang it so exquisitely, so tenderly and poetically—but I will come to her singing in a moment. The second

group of her program was Schubert and Schumann—*Du bist die Ruh'*, *Hark Hark! the Lark!*, *Ungeduld*, *Der Nussbaum*, and *Frühlingsnacht*. The third group was all Brahms; I cannot recall it without emotion, *Die Mainacht*, *Unbewegte Laue Luft*, *Wir Wandelten*, and *Meine Liebe ist Grün*. Lastly came five folk-songs, classics in Lena's repertoire. One Czech, one Russian, one French, one Italian, and *Comin' Thro' the Rye*. Altogether there must have been ten or twelve encores, and I have never seen such flowers, nor so many, at any concert. With all the people on the stage there was no room for the enormous baskets and bouquets, and after the piano could hold no more, and Lena was standing in a bower of them, the rest were carried to the greenroom.

But her voice was the only thing that mattered; and to hear that voice again was worth years of my life. When she began her very first phrase, *O Sleep*, with a trill like shimmering diamonds, a pain of ecstasy shot through me. To me the noblest and most exalted thing about Lena's singing was always the incredible smoothness and balance of her *legato*; this was the first thing she gave us that day, much as if to say, 'Don't be worried, I am here, just as I always was.' She must have known how each feature of her singing would remain in painful suspense until we heard it again, and one by one she brought all these treasures back to us. Would there be a tremolo to mar her faultless execution? Not in those first three exacting songs. Would her voice have lost its radiant charm and beguiling grace? Not when we heard *Die Verschweigung*. Would it be flexible still, and liquid? You should have heard her runs and turns in *Moto di Gioia!* In the Schubert and Schumann her voice began even more to glow and warm, until when she reached *Ungeduld*, which had always sent her public wild, we were

all clinging to the arms of our chairs with unabashed worship on our faces. How she sang those words—*Dein ist mein Herz, und soll es ewig, ewig bleiben!*—with their incomparable opportunities to display her full voice in its total beauty. But it was the Brahms that literally floored the audience, and here I realized suddenly that there *was* an audible effect of Lena's illness. For these songs are the most passionate expressions of mature love-music; and though I had always considered her Isolde the ultimate of that art, I was struck in the *Mainacht*, where she rose to the burning climax near the end, by a new quality in her voice, something even Isolde had never possessed. This was a richness, a definite increase of physical quality, in a voice that I had already thought richer and more sensuous than any I had ever known. She blurred one's vision with the suffusion of this physical warmth, and none of it was laid on by any new vocal trick; it was the basic instrument itself, grown more poignant and more compelling.

When I finally realized that this was the truth, that I was not merely overcome and unbalanced in judgment by my joy at hearing her, I began to listen critically to see if some other element of her singing had diminished in proportion to its increase here. This I found to be the case. To a certain degree (and in no way did she attempt to conceal it) the volume of her voice was minutely reduced from the size it had attained during her height at the Metropolitan. Since Lena never forced anyway, and often sang less loudly than other *hoch-dramatische* sopranos, I was used to expecting quality rather than mere volume from her, and in this her "new" voice encouraged me all the more.

And the more concerts she sang, in the last years of her career, the more she permitted this natural tendency to assert itself—to sing with every resource of feeling, intelligence,

and physical beauty of tone, rather than to concern herself with size. Perhaps this was the outward indication of the profound changes through which she had passed. Perhaps it was her way of ageing—a blessed and miraculously fortunate way, compared with the loss of voice or of skill that marks most women when they move beyond their prime. Whatever it was, it brought Lena Geyer in the closing years of her career to the point where all George's teasing and arguing had never drawn her—to supremacy as a concert singer. Once she had closed the door upon operatic excitement and emotionalism, she could give all of her older, gentler, and wiser self to lyric music. At the last she came into her own in the subtle world of the song, and from then until she withdrew from her public entirely, she unfailingly gave it the tenderest strokes of her genius.

"Hell, no," George said, lighting his cigar after our usual speakeasy dinner. "Lena didn't sing much during that year before the return concert. Old Pizzetti saw to that. Dave, I never saw anything like that old guy in my whole cock-eyed life. Here he was half-dead when Lena got sick. You know already how he was just a nut on the idea that she'd get well. Jesus, when she was lying there like something bopped with a pole-ax, all those weeks in Henry's house, I didn't think she'd ever come to. I was just waiting for her to die or get put in some sanatorium where she could peter out in peace. But old Pizzetti—he girded up his loins like Moses crossing the Rubicon and got set for the fight. When Lena married Henry in California, Pizzetti was sore as a boil, but only for a couple of days. Pretty soon he began to change his mind about that. He used to purse up his lips and frown and nod like Henry when he looks at a painting, and say 'Perhaps. Perhaps this is right for her. A man who

loves her—quiet—all the old things wiped away—yes, this will be right for Lena.’ So all the time they were out West the old boy spent getting himself in shape for business. He got to be about as retiring and modest as Mussolini—can you tie that—after being just a sentimental old hanger-on a few years before.

“That day she first sang again when I made such a monkey of myself, Pizzetti took over the reins and drove the bandwagon. After that he worked with her every day, but so gradually you hardly saw what he was doing. One day she’d sing five scales, the next day six, and the next day, for some reason, he wouldn’t let her open her trap. He’d just sit at the piano and play and talk to her. Funny thing—none of us ever came right out and asked when she’d begin to sing again, and the Met was as dead an issue as the Boer War. Lena never mentioned it, you can bet your shirt I didn’t, and when she got beyond scales and exercises to where she was going to sing something, Pizzetti had her start on Handel and Bach—so that was how much anybody thought of opera. When it got along in May and she was singing about three-quarters of an hour a day, I began to itch for a little business. You know—you can’t blame me. All this creeping up on things and treating Lena like a baby was sweet and lovely but Christ Almighty, Lena was a pretty tough old war horse when you came right down to it and I wanted to know when she was going to smell the gunpowder again. So I got old Pizzetti off by himself and asked him to give me the low-down. I wanted to get this opera issue straight, too. He told me right off she’d certainly never sing opera again, and I felt like kissing the old fossil, believe me. Once I had that straight I went right to Lena and began to treat her like a grown-up woman. I asked her did she want to sing at all any more and if so, where?

"She gave me one of those funny looks of hers, like a turtle, you know with her eyes nearly closed, and said, 'What did you think I was going to do with my time—run the Ladies' Aid?' So then I asked her was she really through with the Met and she said she was. So then I asked her did she really mean I could count on all her time for concerts, and she said absolutely. Gee, I nearly knocked her over, I was so excited. Business had been rotten—you know how I told you that first time you came to see me. All these new hicks calling themselves managers had come butting in, and as soon as Lena got sick and everybody thought she was through, then I wasn't Lena Geyer's manager any more, and when they get an idea like that in this racket, it's good night. There weren't any promising youngsters coming along and if there had been I'd have had trouble selling Phillips and Hofheim to 'em, without that big-time flavor that Geyer gave us. So I was pretty sore on the world. And then the dough—Lord, Lena alone used to make enough dough for us to run the whole business on and everything else was gravy.

"So I was feeling pretty low and Lena knew it. She told me not to worry, just to hold her a date in February for a New York recital, and we'd see what happened after that. Well, you've got all the press notices, you know what happened. Shame you haven't got room for 'em in your book. Remember how old Warner said this was enough to renew a man's faith in God, and all miracles weren't confined to ancient history? That tickled me. Anyway, the morning after the concert I went up to the Plaza with all the papers and I took the box-office statement along. Jesus, that was a pretty sight. The biggest gross you could get for a Carnegie Hall recital. Lena was lying in bed with a breakfast tray beside her and she was putting away a whole grape-

fruit, grilled kidneys, shirred eggs, au gratin potatoes, a basket of rolls, about a quart of coffee and some figs with cream to top off with. Yeah, I know, sounds terrible, but that was Lena. God, it made me feel so good I could have turned somersaults, just to see her like her old self, licking fig juice off her fingers and talking in four languages at once—English to me, Czech to Dora, German to Henry, just because she was in the mood, and Italian to Pizzetti when he came in. We were all lying around on the foot of her bed and just about eating her up with our eyes—she sure looked good. Honest, she looked ten years younger than before she got sick. I don't see why her hair wasn't grayer, it ought to have been, but it was just that same nice brown color, curling around her shoulders, and her eyes were as big and green as a cat's, and her color was good, and that big Bohunk face of hers grinning from ear to ear. She had on some kind of a whatyoucallem—bed jacket—with a white fur collar that stood up around her neck and tied with a bow in front. She looked like a big pussy cat that you wanted to hug.

"Elsa deHaven was in the next room writing thank-you notes for all the flowers—poor little dame, she always got the dirty work—and pretty soon she came in and said Sandheim was downstairs and wanted to come up—yeah, that assistant manager from the Met. We all looked at each other like a lot of kids caught in mischief. Lena pulled the grande dame and said if the manager himself couldn't make the effort to come, she certainly wasn't going to bother with Sandheim—but I told her why be nasty, the Met had never done her any dirt and probably Sandheim had some special reason for coming himself. His reason was that he was so tickled to see her he was half crying when he came in the room. I was all for leaving but Lena asked me to stay—

Henry and Pizzetti oozed out. Sandheim just clutched her hand and kept looking at her as if he couldn't get enough of her. 'That concert yesterday,' he said over and over, shaking his head. 'That miracle!' Well after the miracle was pretty well settled he came to the point. 'When are you coming home to us?' he asked. That was the way he put it. Lena just lay there perfectly quiet and relaxed, and dropped a bombshell.

" 'I'm not coming back,' she said.

"Sandheim damn near keeled over. He looked at her like he hadn't heard right. 'What? Not coming back? What do you mean?' he said.

"Lena shook her head. 'I'm sorry, Sandy,' she said. 'I can't. Everything changes, you know, and I've changed too. I can't sing opera any more. You can say I'm too old if you want to.'

" 'I can't say anything of the sort,' he said. 'Look at you! You look like a girl, your voice is greater than ever—and you tell me you're through with opera. Have you lost your mind?'

" 'I guess so,' Lena said, like she was bored to death. I could see she was trying to cut things short and not go into the business any deeper. But Sandheim wouldn't be put off like that. He insisted on knowing what was the real trouble. He knew how crazy Lena really was about opera and he couldn't believe she'd changed like that. So he kept driving at her with questions. All of a sudden she sat up straight in bed and braced herself with her hands behind her and looked at him with one of those big, earnest stares.

" 'Sandy,' she said, 'listen. The trouble isn't with me. The trouble is with the Met. I didn't want to come out with all this, but you insisted. So I'll tell you. The Met is awful. The conductors are rotten. The singers I did my best work with are all gone. The Wagner is shot to pieces, and it

would grind me down to be the one who had to pull it together again. I can't do it. You can't expect me to walk in there at this stage of the game, with all my memories of the history we made, and pull the old wagon along single-handed. That's what happens every time I sing—doesn't it?"

"Sandheim had to admit that. 'So that's what's the matter,' Lena said. 'I have no idea how strong I really am. I have to be careful. I feel fine now but you never can tell. And between you and me, I'm no squab chicken and I won't be singing very much longer in any case. I'll only go on as long as my voice is good.'

" 'So you are going on?' Sandheim asked. 'What are you going to do, just concerts?'

"Lena nodded. 'That's all,' she said. 'Just concerts. Give my love to Gatti and tell him I'll drop in to see him some day soon.'

"You know, Dave, I actually felt sorry for poor Sandheim. He was all cut up. It was pretty tough to have Lena tell him the Met wasn't good enough for her to sing in, or what amounted to that, and he knew it was true, too. But at the same time I couldn't help feeling God-damn pleased. I remembered the time Lena asked me to let her off of concerts on account of the Met, and promised me some day she'd do something for me. Well, she was certainly getting ready to do it now, and believe me, she did it. She took it very easy that season, the spring of 1921, but the next four seasons, up to the spring of 1925, she piled up such a wad of dough in our office that I was able to thumb my nose at the whole God-damn racket for five years afterwards."

Another evening when George and I were talking I asked him something that had been on my mind for a long time. I said, "George, of course we all think Lena was the grandest

woman who ever lived, and all that. We rave about her to each other like a lot of sophomores. But just between you and me, Lena was human after all. Didn't you ever have any trouble with her? Wasn't there anything the matter with her? Didn't she have any faults?"

George laughed. "Sure she had faults," he answered. "Plenty of 'em. One thing she always raised hell about was money. You know Lena was funny that way. When she wanted to sing opera with Vestri she didn't care how much dough she threw away by refusing concerts. But when she did sing concerts she wanted to squeeze every drop of juice out of the cow. She was nobody's fool, but in all the years I knew her I could never explain what we did with our twenty per cent commission and why we charged it. Sometimes she would be pretty easy and kid me and call me a robber, but other times she could be pretty near a bitch. She'd send for me to come to her place with the statements, and when I got there I'd find her sitting up straight on the edge of a chair looking like Queen Victoria, with that high collar and all. She'd be tapping her foot on the floor and she'd grab the statements from me and run down the sheets with her eye and suddenly point to some figure and say, 'What is the meaning of this, may I ask?'

"I always knew I dassent kid her or say 'Aw, come on, now, Lena,' or something like that, when she acted this way. I had to play it straight. I'd be very meek and explain in words of one syllable what this item of twenty-three dollars and sixty-two cents was, or why I had charged her seventy cents taxi fare for the office boy instead of sending him somewhere in the subway. It wouldn't cut any ice with her. 'This is an outrage!' she'd say. 'Here I work and slave and drag myself all over the country like a cheap drummer, just to support a lot of parasites and loafers. What right have

you to swill off nearly half of what I earn? Parasite! Money-grabber!

"The first few times she did this I got pretty sore, believe me. Nobody can call me dirty names and get away with it. I stood right up to her and told her if she could find a manager who wasn't a crook like me, to go right ahead and do it. I didn't want her damn business anyway; all those years when she was at the Met it had just cost me a lot of money to keep books for her when she wasn't earning anything for me. But pretty soon I saw it was nutty to stand up to her. This didn't mean a damn thing. Lena never did much else like these prima donnas you read about, so I decided what the hell, if she wanted to tear her hair once in a while, it was no skin off my nose.

"But she did have two or three real mean spots. One was sort of like this—Lena wasn't charitable. She didn't have a scrap of charity. Yeah, I know you'll tell me all she did for Pizzetti, but that's different from what I mean. She had a terrific idea of obligation. If she thought she owed somebody something, she'd plunge to the limit to pay 'em off. But just to lend a helping hand to a stranger—not Lena. She thought she owed everything in the world to Pizzetti, so she supported him just like he was her father. He never really had to work after she got famous. And she took out a life-insurance policy on him, for Luisa and the kids, and she paid for eight years for his boy Tony in college and medical school and set him up in practice after he graduated. But that was just because Pizzetti had done about the same for her. If you were ever fool enough to ask Lena for money you'd see what I mean, damn quick. Sometimes I'd be around when somebody'd ask for a loan, or ask her to contribute to something, and she'd freeze right up and snap she was sorry, she couldn't. This was the only thing about her that got

Henry's goat. He'd never admit it to you. But you know how those rich Jews are about charity—especially Henry, and his first wife supported half the hospitals and day nurseries in New York, I guess. So when he found out Lena was like this he was real shocked, and they were both much too old to try any reforming on each other. I found out he used to just quietly send checks to charities and things in her name.

“And Lena was pretty cruel, Dave. She was awful just, nobody could finagle with right and wrong around her, but she didn't make much allowance for people to be the kind of slobs most of 'em are. You know how she used to make fun of other singers—now that was funny as hell, of course, but to be able to get under the skin of a thing with real ridicule takes a kind of sharp cruelty, and Lena had it. She was loyal—my God, I never saw such loyalty—look at the way she made Henry practically marry Elsa deHaven. But that didn't stop her from making fun of Elsa sometimes, and she did it with just enough edge so it wasn't all teasing. Then she had a way of making people she was bored with feel like two cents. She could pick some little mouse of a person she did like, and be as natural and kind as an old nigger mammy—but sometimes she'd take a dislike to some of these poor devils that worshipped her and when she'd see 'em coming in the greenroom she'd start to get vague and snooty and I used to sweat for fear she'd do this to a reporter some time and get checked on it. That never happened, but Lena wouldn't lift a finger to be nicer to the press than anybody else. She'd be furious with me if I tried to ask her to. ‘What am I?’ she'd snort at me, ‘Gloria Swanson?’

“The last couple of years Lena was on tour we used to have fun, though. I pretty nearly always went along because,

you know, after all that fright and worry about her I wanted to keep my eye on her. And of course Elsa deHaven went along, and Dora, and most of the time Henry. He didn't really want Lena to sing any more. Once she proved she could, that was all he wanted, so she'd be happy—after that he wanted her to let down and grow old with him. Lena wouldn't, not until she made up her own mind to retire. He was so crazy about her, Dave. He just wanted to be near her and that was all. He used to sit and look at her as if she was the whole damned world. So what with Sam Rosenau and Joe and me and Henry's valet, if it was a long trip, we were some caravan—eight of us. Lena didn't raise hell like she did when she was younger. It was easier to get decent things to eat and somehow if Henry was there he always pulled whatever Lena wanted out of his hat.

"Of course even Henry couldn't do much about Prohibition. You can imagine what Lena thought of that. My God, how she used to rave. For twenty-five years she hadn't drunk water with her food and she was used to wine and beer, nothing else. Henry had good wine in his cellar in New York, but you couldn't carry a dozen cases of that around the country with you, and there was no decent beer to be had for love or money. You could get booze from any bellhop in America, the kind that'd burn the lining off your guts, but Lena never drank hard liquor. She always had the best to give people, but only wine and beer for herself. We tried everything. Near-beer and Bevo and grape juice and loganberry juice and every other kind of juice, and Lena would patiently taste each new one, make a face, spit it out, and say '*Pfui!*' Finally she gave up and took to mineral water, some special kind with a green and white checked label, I forget the name. This was very fancy and expensive; you couldn't buy it in any old dump, like White Rock, so we had

to have it shipped from Charles's in New York. I'd send them the itinerary and they'd send out a couple of dozen bottles every so often, to meet us on tour.

"You ought to have seen us stowing on board a train for a long ride. We had to have about half a car, there were so many of us, and we all had so many chores to do that Lena would take at least two drawing rooms—one for her and Henry and one for Elsa deHaven; then in the daytime we'd all use Elsa's for a sort of parlor. Lena and Henry and Elsa and Sam and I would eat in it, and play pinochle or bridge, and I guess we did more laughing on those rides than most people do in a lifetime. One year we seemed to have a rush of animals—pets. God knows why—Lena usually paid no more attention to animals than she did to children or house-keeping. But it began like a kind of hocus-pocus. Lena was singing in Minneapolis, I think it was, and the house was jammed. She looked gorgeous that night, she had on a light green satin dress with shiny embroidery and a long train. When she came out on the stage she sort of swirled this train around her ankles so it spread out in front of her. Then she began to sing. She was right in the middle of *Bist Du Bei Mir*, that wonderful Bach thing, in the first group, when a great big roughneck of a gray tomcat strolled out on the stage, looked around, wandered over to Lena's feet, smelled the train, stepped onto it just as dainty as you please, and curled up there. This was too much for the audience. Jesus, they began to laugh and snicker and I nearly burst a blood-vessel, I was so wild. I didn't want to go out on the stage and grab the cat while Lena was singing, but the audience was getting terribly fidgety. Pretty soon somebody laughed right out loud and Lena came down to earth a little and hesitated. She looked down at her feet and here was this big mug of a cat, peacefully settled for the night. She simply

roared. You know in some ways Lena was kind of like a cat herself.

"She laughed and bowed and stayed cool while an usher took the cat away, and then she began over again. Later she said to us, 'Thank God it was only a cat. I thought I'd lost my pants.' But somehow that started a flock of animals chasing after us. When we got to Iowa City some old admirer of hers gave her a puppy. I told her she'd have to give the damn thing away before we left town, but she was afraid this person would find out, so she said we'd better take the dog to the next town and give it to some kid there. Well, it was a cute dog, and Lena got attached to it, so when we got to the next town she decided she wouldn't give it away. It had to stay. Of course it wasn't housebroken or train-broken or any other kind of broken and it got its neck damn near broken by me for its trouble. It did its business in my fur-lined overcoat that Lena gave me.

"Then we switched to the Southern circuit, and in Florida one day we went to one of these alligator farms to sightsee. Of course when the owner saw Lena Geyer nothing would do, he had to give her a pair of baby alligators for a souvenir. I tried to tip him off they'd be a nuisance, but nothing doing—Lena overheard me and she decided she thought alligators were interesting so she told him she'd love to have them. So then we had them, living in the washbowl in Elsa's drawing room. But the climax came in Havana where Henry went absolutely haywire and bought three parrots—I never knew him to do a fool thing before or since. But these were something very special—maybe parrakeets, I don't know and I don't give a damn. Anyway they had feathers about five yards long, all the colors of the rainbow, and they cost a million dollars and Henry wanted them for the conservatory at White Plains. I thought they could go in cages in the

baggage car, but Henry thought they were too valuable, so he gave the porter ten dollars to let him keep them in his drawing room. Of course the damn things screeched bloody murder all night, and Lena nearly cut their throats. She stood it for about ten minutes and then she moved out and went to sleep in Elsa deHaven's drawing room. She was just nice and quiet and everybody settled down, except the parrots, when there was a yell like all the devils in hell were loose, and we all burst into Elsa's room. Lena was sitting up in bed screaming like a maniac. One of the alligators had got bored in the washbowl and started to crawl around and see the world, so he crawled all over Lena. This was the top. She made me go and sleep in the drawing room with Henry and those f—— parrots and she slept in my common ordinary berth all the way back to New York."

Chapter Twenty-four

LENA GEYER had a certain characteristic uncommon to opera singers : her honesty with herself. Most singers are incapable of seeing themselves as they really are, and of judging themselves musically and humanly as they are all too ready to judge their colleagues. Perhaps reading the ominous knell of a bad criticism of somebody else will make a failing singer secretly search her own heart, but usually she will not act on her suspicions. She will encourage herself to be blind and deaf to them. The great majority of men and women go on singing long after they have passed their vocal prime, and the public usually accepts their decline without grumbling, because of affection for their personalities or admiration for such fine things as they can still do.

Lena had no patience with artists who clung to waning careers, or who rode along on momentum or the strength of their reputations. She was merciless in condemning them, and when Henry once gently reminded her that she might some day be equally fallible, she retorted, "You know I am incapable of that. I'd rather be dead than sing when I know I'm breaking. And I'll know—long before anyone else does." Henry trusted her, but he did not trust to chance. He was so sensitive to every shade and attitude of her nature and her life that he was able to do some of her thinking for her. He felt far more keenly than she the peculiar pitfalls and possible tragedies that lie in wait for the ageing singer.

There is no more pitiful and more familiar figure than the retired prima donna, who is seldom a contented and well-

adjusted woman; more often she is either a teacher, gossiping and verbose and nostalgic, or a caricature, still clinging to the spectacular looks and ways of her prime, or a disappointed, embittered recluse with a perpetual grudge against destiny. Not even in the theatre, which is the only comparable world, is the inevitable tragedy of years so remorselessly imposed on the artist. In every other creative and interpretive avenue of life, age only richens and widens the artist's function and scope. In singing she must lose her means of expression when she is in the full flower of intelligence and experience with which to use it best. This is the reason for tears and sorrow at the thought of a singer's retirement; every sensitive person knows that the artist is condemned henceforward to prison.

And the retirement of a prima donna is never accomplished without comment. Voluntary or otherwise, her withdrawal from the stage and the concert hall is marked either by demonstrative and highly publicized farewells, or by pervading gossip: the voice was going long ago; she is years older than she claims; she should have retired five years sooner; maybe she needn't quit now, the voice is breaking but she can still hold an audience. Lena was passionately determined that none of these typical factors should mark her retirement. She sang through her last four seasons acutely critical of herself; she knew exactly when the timbre of her voice began to change, when it began to thin in texture, when it started, by infinitesimal degrees, to lose its thread of electricity. It never once, that I know of, failed her in pitch, in execution, or in its basic quality of warmth and physical ecstasy. And Lena never failed it, by which I mean that the full value of a technique such as hers is never completely apparent until age begins to change the vocal organ itself.

Then the mistress of a faultless technique can rely on it to produce perfect song where the natural elasticity of the young voice is no longer at her command. Lena never forgot the first admonitions of Lilli Lehmann in this respect, and she practised her exercises, scales, and arpeggios far more conscientiously at the end of her career than she had at the beginning. Henry watched all this keenly and silently. His one desire above all others was that when Lena did retire, she should not find herself at a loose end, idle and baffled and bored.

Lena told George in the fall of 1924 that that would be her last season. "She didn't put on an act about it," he told me. "She was just swell. When we started out on tour that November we left the Grand Central about six-thirty in the evening. Lena told Sam and me to come to the drawing room for dinner and we had a wonderful meal there—the five of us. Henry brought most of it on board—caviar and green turtle soup and quails and you know. He had a lot of champagne, too, and when we got to the dessert Lena filled everybody's glass up and then she leaned forward and looked around at us all and started to talk. I guess I can remember every word she said. I ought to. She said: 'My darlings, I want you all to drink farewell to Lena Geyer. Nobody knows this yet except just us—the family. This is our last tour, our last season. There won't be any public statement. We're just going along to do our job, and in the spring when we're all through, George will announce it. I don't want any farewell appearances and drummed-up emotion. Let's have all the fun we can this year, and please, let's not be sad. There's no reason to. My work is done. You've all made it possible. God bless us every one, as Dickens said. And now two toasts together. Farewell to Lena Geyer'—she paused and looked

at Henry with the sweetest expression you ever saw on a woman's face—'and the health of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Loeffler!'

"We were all feeling pretty teary and shaky, you can bet your boots, but we knew Lena meant it when she asked us not to take on. She really would have hated it if we'd gone around with long faces and funeral manners. So we all spent the evening laughing and singing things like *Du Du Liegst mir im Herzen* and *Old Black Joe*, and all the rest of that winter we put ourselves out to be cheerful and give each other a good time. Her last Carnegie Hall recital was in March, sold out as usual and a wow. She sang everything everybody loved, and looked—well, hell, you were there. You know how gorgeous she was. Remember that green velvet dress, and the way she suddenly comes out and sings *Dich teure Halle* for an encore? Jesus, that was something. Here I'd been nagging her for seventeen years to sing that in concert and she never would. And all of a sudden she just pops it. Remember how they yelled? And Gatti and Sandheim when they came back to the greenroom? And you know why she sang it, don't you, Dave? Because half an hour before the concert Elsa deHaven was so broken up she could hardly walk—Dora was dosing her with ammonia and whiskey and everything but dynamite. And Lena walks in, all ready for the concert, and finds this blubbing wreck on the bed. Lena felt terrible. She often told me she knew her voice meant more to Elsa than to anybody in the world—even herself. So she took Elsa in her arms, all dressed up and everything, not even thinking of tears spoiling that swell velvet dress, and she just rocked to and fro on the bed kind of crooning to her and telling her not to feel bad. After a while Elsa quieted down a little and Lena asked her could she

make out to calm herself during the concert. She asked her was there anything she could do so Elsa wouldn't take it so hard. Elsa didn't say much, she was too cut up, but she told me Lena said, 'Elsa, if I sing the *Hallenaria* for you, will you try not to be so unhappy?' Seems this was their special song, it had some extra sentimental meaning for them. So Elsa promised and that's why Lena sprang it at the concert. And Elsa was a soldier, too. She has guts."

As if I could forget that moment, when Lena came out for her first encore before the intermission, with the audience so uproarious they could hardly quiet down for her to sing! Lena never announced her encores—for one thing her audiences were so close to her that they usually knew her mood and her encores, and for another she sometimes liked to surprise them. When Sam started, for the first time in all his years with Lena, to play those opening bars on the piano, there was a yell from all over the house. I do not remember ever being quite so excited, for the surprise was stunning. When *Dich teure Halle* pealed from Lena's throat people around me gasped with joy. I had grown gradually accustomed to the change in her voice these past years, and had learned to love its deeper, quieter quality just as much as the glorious fire of her youth. I had never expected to hear my boyhood idol in all her overwhelming glory again, but this last miracle of Lena's was, after all, only true to her art and herself. She sang that most thrilling of arias with every drop of the liquid fire she had ever had at her command, and when she reached the repeated *Sei' mir gegrüsst* she built it up with irresistible, pulsating ecstasy. She ripped off the final phrase, high B and all, as if she were just now making her entrance into the world of music, and the house went insane with joy before Sam could finish the accompaniment. But neither I

nor anyone except Lena's "family" knew that we were hearing her farewell concert, for George had promised her not to tell this; and as I look back over her career I realize what a subtle, yet powerful thing she did.

A few weeks later, on the fifteenth of May, 1925, which was her fiftieth birthday, Phillips and Hofheim released to the press the announcement that Lena Geyer had sung her last concert, and had retired. George told me this just before it appeared publicly, so that I was not surprised. And I was already rational enough, sufficiently beyond my passionately youthful and unreasoning worship, and settled in a maturer devotion to her as a woman (though I had not yet met her) to see that she had done the right thing, and done it well.

Lena had the sort of face and body that retain their vitality through the years. Perhaps because she had never been a beauty, or famed for some particular physical feature like hair or coloring, she seemed never to lose the basic things that made her beautiful to us and striking to strangers. Her carriage was always magnificent, her skin never coarsened or sagged, her hair, which she had never dyed or dressed eccentrically, retained its healthy gloss and turned gray in two wings along the temples. Her eyes of course were fabulous—those deep emerald wells that could say more than the tongues of all the other people I have known. As the result of her rigorous training in stage deportment, she always moved with freedom and smoothness and grace, and her energetic stride was dearer to us than almost anything about her. All these are qualities that age does not take from a woman, but age did add some things to make her even more distinguished. It gave her repose and a certain slowness of movement which made her rather imposing, as I felt her to be when I first met her in 1926. Lena was peculiar in many

physical respects, for she did not impress one as looking or acting younger than her years, yet youthfulness was one of her marked characteristics.

She and Henry were so handsome together that they drew admiring glances for their looks alone, wherever they appeared. He was extremely distinguished, of medium height, which made him really no taller than Lena, with glowing black eyes, finely cut, aquiline Semitic features, warm olive skin, and iron-gray hair, with a close-clipped mustache much whiter than his hair. He had slender brown hands with very delicate fingers; it used to delight me to see him pick up and handle a Chinese porcelain or a jewel. I speak of Henry as he was when I first knew him, for since Lena's death he has changed tragically, and is now quite as aged and feeble as his seventy years might suggest. But in the few years after her retirement, when she was well and strong and devoting herself entirely to him and his pleasures, he was full of enthusiasm and warmth and energy. Together they gave boundlessly of these qualities, and especially to me, for up until the time I knew them I had had few opportunities to broaden my life. I had spent every minute, since I was sixteen, either working at school or college, or in earning money in the summer time with which to pursue my education, or in listening to and worshipping Lena from a distance. It changed my whole life to know her and Henry well, and to be an intimate of their home.

Lena had time now for something she had never done in all her life. She became a hostess. Of course she had such fascination for people that she drew them around her like bees to blossoms. Any room that she was in was a warm and vital room. But she had no social talents of the conventional sort, and she did not try to develop them. She told me once that having known Minnie Loeffler as a hostess she

saw the futility of trying to imitate her. Lena turned to the sort of thing that came naturally to her, drawing people together who had strong mutual interests regardless of their social status or identity. Where the first Mrs. Loeffler had given magnificent parties for the socially great, entertaining them with splendid music, Lena began to give two or three parties a season for all sorts of people who loved music, whether they were great or humble. Everybody wanted to play at her parties; she would start out by engaging a string quartet or two pianists, but the guests also included all the celebrated musicians at that time in New York. After the arranged program was over, and a wonderful supper—because though Lena had no interest in housekeeping she was a genius at menus and wines—the least intimate of her friends would take their leave, and twenty or thirty of us would stay.

Then somebody always drifted over to the piano and the music would begin to flow spontaneously. We made it a compact never to say elsewhere who played this way at Lena's house, for Hofmann and Heifetz and Zimbalist and Casals and all the rest of them were afraid that other hostesses would take advantage of the knowledge and pester them to play at their houses too. But at Lena's—usually out at White Plains, but sometimes at the Plaza—there was an atmosphere that made them enjoy their own music. And that is rare. Most musicians loathe playing anywhere except in concert. At the Loefflers' they did anything they were in the mood for, from musical clowning to the most memorable of serious experiences. Once I heard Zimbalist and Heifetz play the Bach double concerto there at two o'clock in the morning, and I am sure neither of them ever played more nobly in his life. And, of course, when everybody else played and sang that way, Lena could not refuse if they asked her to

sing. She had no plausible excuse for refusing—she could not say she had a performance the next day, and everyone knew her voice was there, so she needed little urging before she would let Sam Rosenau drag her over to the piano and start something they had all been clamoring for. George never missed one of these evenings, and he and Elsa deHaven and I used to sit in a corner perfectly content just to listen while everyone else crowded around Lena crying, “*Unge-duld*, please!” “*Ständchen!*” “*Bois Solitaire*, Lena, remember you promised!”

Henry Loeffler had hardly dared to hope that Lena would adjust herself so happily to life without her work, and he was too gentle and modest to take any of the credit for it. He chose to think Lena the most wonderful, intelligent, satisfying woman in the world, without admitting that he was almost solely responsible for her well-being. With a different turn of fate, she might have ended her career in loneliness and protest, as so many others have done. Instead she made herself and the rest of us radiantly happy. The first season after she retired she was a little restless and she told Henry she thought she would take two or three pupils, but he shrank from that. Though he had never dreamed of demurring at her singing as long as she wished to do it, he objected to her doing any other sort of work at all. She was a very wealthy woman in her own right, but he would never allow her to spend a penny of her own money after he married her, and it gave him great satisfaction after she retired to feel that she was dependent on him. This was not really the case, of course, but he pretended that it was. Lena was a little annoyed at his requesting her not to teach. She was not accustomed to considering anyone else's wishes in making her decisions, but she allowed herself to be guided by him. Henry was a saint and it would have been cruel and stupid

ever to oppose him on the rare occasions when he expressed his wishes. Most of the time he did whatever Lena wanted.

Every spring they went to Europe, taking the inevitable Dora, who, since she was growing old herself, was secretly rather pleased with the cessation of her strenuous activities. She was extremely proud of Lena and she thought Henry practically a king. She used to stalk onto a ship carrying Lena's sable coat and jewel case and give the stewards the haughtiest glares as she informed them that the *Gnädige Herr und Frau Fürst und Fürstin* Loeffler wanted none of them—they had their own servants to wait on them. Lena would be furious when she heard Dora up to these tricks, and she would take her into a cabin and lock the door and give her a terrific scolding in Czech for being so vulgar and arrogant. But nobody could really do anything with Dora. She had the mind of a twelve-year-old, with the exception of certain astonishing flashes of perspicacity, the loyalty of a bulldog, and the skill of a surgeon, in her own small field.

Lena had a funny little way, in these years, of calling herself Mrs. Loeffler. So long as she was singing she never thought of this, but when she settled down with Henry she did not want to be anything but his wife in identity. Of course everybody continued to call her Madame Geyer from habit. People took her and all her habits for granted when they knew her—they did not even remark that it was odd for Elsa deHaven to continue to live with her. Henry and Lena and Elsa lived a strangely intimate and tender life, and their doing so was a triumph of tact and understanding on the part of all three. So long as Lena lived, Elsa would have been an emotional wreck apart from her. After she died Elsa found it easier to go away alone and live almost entirely in reminiscences.

Naturally she found ways of leaving the Loefflers to themselves from time to time. She made up fictitious reasons for wanting to go to the West Indies in the winter when they were going to California, or to Canada in the summer when they were going to Europe. If they insisted she join them on their trips, she always came home three weeks or a month before they did, saying she must get the house in order, although there were twelve or fifteen servants at White Plains and the whole staff at the Plaza to do these things. In her quiet way Elsa was excellent company, and nobody appreciated this more than Henry Loeffler. Elsa knew better than anyone how to match every shade of Lena's moods and keep her happy. You never knew what Elsa really thought of you, and when I first knew her I felt she did not like me at all. Later I found she resented my intrusion into Lena's private life, but she liked me personally and trusted me; and finally she proved this by helping me with this book and at last by telling me something I could not otherwise have known.

This was her account of a day in Paris in the spring of 1926—just a few months after I had met Lena. "It was one of those incomparable Paris springs," she wrote me, "a day in late May that made you want to write poetry or music or do something impulsive and romantic. The Tuileries gardens were a mass of tulips and hyacinths and primroses, and the grass was that clear new green, and all the chestnut trees were in full blossom. We had been having a wonderful time—buying new clothes and going to the races and doing all sorts of things we had never had time for. Lena loved horses, you know—she always loved to go to the races, especially if Henry would let her bet as much as she wanted. On this wonderful day I am speaking of I was to meet Lena at Armenonville for lunch, and Henry was

to drive past there afterward from some appointment of his and pick us up and take us out to Auteuil. We all had different things we were doing in the morning.

"Lena had told me she would reserve a certain table in the corner of the terrace, under a big chestnut tree, where we often sat, and I got there a few minutes past our appointment and started to go to our table from the side of the garden where I had entered, which was the opposite side from the restaurant entrance. I saw Lena already sitting there, but she did not see me; her face was turned three-quarters away from me, and her back was toward the big chestnut tree. She looked so lovely that I actually paused to enjoy the sight of her, as if I were a stranger. She had on a suit of soft green tweed, with a high-collared blouse with a big jabot of Binche lace—you know how she always wore collars like that. She wore a small hat of dark green straw that turned up sharply from the left side of her face, with three little quills shooting up from the crown. She was sitting there with her elbows propped on the table and her chin in her hands, just idly looking at things and waiting for me. Her skin in the soft checkered sunlight under that blossoming tree looked like a girl's—the way you say you loved to see it whenever she wore a white wig. That was how she looked—feminine and irresistible. I was still at some distance from her when I realized suddenly that someone was coming toward her from the opposite side of the garden—a very tall man who stooped and walked slowly as if he were feeble or ill. His hair and his pointed beard were snow white, and his face very pale. It was Louis de Chartres!

"I was panic-stricken. My first thought was that he hated me—that it would be cruel and blundering for me to join Lena at this moment. Whether or not she wanted to see him, he was about to speak to her. I stopped where I was. He

walked slowly toward her with his eyes fixed on her face, and when he was quite near she saw him and leaned forward in delighted surprise. She gave him an exquisite smile, tender and calm. She held out her two hands to him, and he bent over them and held them together to his lips.

"For a moment I hesitated there, not wanting to spy on them, but feeling that this was too beautiful a moment to turn one's back on. It was like looking at two angels. He kept her hands in his and they looked at each other without speaking. Then I realized suddenly that I must go away and leave them, and I turned and slipped through a group of people near me and made my way around into the restaurant. I could not quite decide what to do. If I went away altogether, and Louis de Chartres did not stay with Lena, she would not understand why I had broken our appointment. I decided to wait and see what they would do. After a few minutes I walked slowly to the door and looked for them at the end of the terrace. They had risen and were standing beside the table. Then they turned and walked away, hand in hand, Lena's steps short and slow to match his.

"When they had left the terrace I went back to our table and found on it a slip of paper from Lena's memorandum book. She had scribbled, 'Please tell Henry I cannot go this afternoon.' I thanked God that I had been there. It was easy to tell Henry that Lena could not go with us, but if I had not known the reason I would have been worried. When Henry and I returned from Auteuil, Lena was sitting by the drawing-room window with her head on her hand, looking out across the hotel garden. She was pale and I knew she had been weeping. When we were alone I told her I had seen her and Louis. She nodded slowly. 'I'm not surprised,' she said. 'I knew something of the sort must have happened. You're

always prompt, you see, and you could not have come to meet me without seeing us. Thank you, Elsa.' She sighed.

"Later she told me that she had sung for Louis for an hour that afternoon, in her old flat in the Rue Monsieur, which he had kept exactly as she left it."

Lena had inevitable sorrows to face. Lilli Lehmann died in 1929, and the following year, Maestro Pizzetti. He was seventy-two, and in his own words, ready to go. As soon as he saw Lena safely re-established in her career, in he retreated into mild old age, and in the remaining nine years of his life he grew increasingly inactive. At the last he did not make any effort to go to Lena's for his daily visit, and she went to him. But it was I who saw the most of Maestro Pizzetti in his last two years, for he was the one of Lena's intimates who loved best to talk about her and who wanted to make sure that I missed nothing. During his last illness, when he had a complication of diseases, and Lena and Henry had summoned the foremost specialists in New York to consult about him, he took my hand one day as Doctor Leonardi, the famous surgeon, left the room. He weakly pulled me down to whisper in my ear.

"That one," he said, jerking his chin at the doctor's back. "That's the one whose bed I slept in that night long ago. I told you. No, Lena doesn't know. He promised me, he won't speak to her. Why remind her, *povera bambina?*"

For the second time in her life Lena sang at a funeral. It was a small gathering in a little neighborhood church, just the Pizzetti family and all of us, and a dozen or so of his old Italian friends and pupils. In the middle of the Requiem Mass, the only voice in the world, for us, began to sing the *Inflammatius* from the Rossini *Stabat Mater*. It was one of the very first things he had taught her, and though she was

then fifty-five years old, and deeply moved, the glory and nobility of her voice never rang out truer, never spoke more eloquently.

Lena had a trick of quoting the words of songs for appropriate moments in her life, and there came a day when she looked up from the newspaper she was reading, shook her head, and said "Gone are the days, sure enough." *Old Black Joe* had been evoked to describe her feeling about the Metropolitan, which was in the midst of the begging campaign for funds during its crisis in Lena could not contemplate its low estate without emotion. As time went on she had grown much gentler in her criticism of the Metropolitan and had almost forgotten the years after the departure of Vestri when opera had been a burden to her. What she remembered was the glorious period, and she was happy to talk to me about that by the hour. She loved to reminisce about Vestri at rehearsals and performances; she used to repeat verbatim every insulting word he would say to each stupid member of the cast and orchestra, but when I asked, "What did he say to you, Lena?" she would only laugh and answer, "He didn't have to talk to me."

It had been coming over me for some months past that Lena was not looking well. At first I thought that the difference in her appearance lay in my imagination, for when I first knew her, when she was already fifty, but still radiant, I had told myself that perhaps I was idealizing her looks out of joy in finally knowing her. Then when she began a few years later to look less well, when I found myself wondering if she was not a bit sallow and drawn, I would remind myself that I was a fool, that the woman must show her age sometime and that she probably did not look different, only that I was growing accustomed to her. But once in a while

I caught Henry looking at her when she did not know it, with an anxious, attentive expression, and finally Elsa deHaven too. I took Elsa off by herself one day and asked her pointblank, "Elsa, do you think Lena is well?"

She looked rather frightened for a moment but answered, "Why yes, I think so, David. She's looking a little tired, perhaps, but I don't think there's anything the matter with her."

But from then on I was more suspicious all the time. I knew that Lena hated illness or anything to do with it, especially so after her long breakdown, and her constant attendance for many months at Maestro Pizzetti's bedside. I had a feeling that if Lena were ill she would hide it at almost any cost rather than see a doctor. And gradually I began to feel convinced, in spite of myself, that she was hiding something, that she was not completely well, and that she would resent it if anyone questioned her. I realized before long that Elsa and Henry were feeling just as I did, and I was really surprised, one day in March, when George was going down in the elevator with me after we had been lunching with Lena, to have him turn to me and snap, "Dave, what the hell's the matter with Lena? Is she sick? She's a bad color."

This was enough to arouse my determination, and I again spoke to Elsa about it. I took it on myself to do so because, not being so intimate with Lena as Elsa, I was more aware of contrasts in her looks, day by day. Elsa assured me that Henry was very uneasy and that he was trying to persuade her to have a thorough physical examination and see if there were some reason for her being rundown. She had not yet agreed to do so, but he thought he could induce her to. It was about then that the committee running the campaign fund for the Metropolitan asked her if she would speak in the intermission at the opera, and ask for contributions to the fund. Lena and Henry had made a very large joint contribution them-

selves, but she agreed to appear and "put up her paws and beg," as she said.

Of course we all wanted to see her on the Metropolitan stage again, even in such a dismal cause as this, and we all went down to the opera house with her—Henry and Elsa, and George and I. It was a Monday night performance of *Aida*, and I paid no attention to the stage because I was so fascinated watching Lena. She sat in the corner of the box checking off the mistakes on her fingers and correcting the diction. She was itching, I could see, to go down there and pull the prima donna together, teach her how to walk and use her hands and chiefly to sing. I realized that a good teacher had been lost when Henry would not let her take any pupils. But after a little of this Lena grew tired and whispered to us, "I can't stand any more of this *Schmiere*—you all come downstairs after the speech and meet me at the office door and we'll go right home."

Then Sandheim came up for Lena and she left the box with him. The act ended and after the curtain-calls Sandheim stepped out and held up his hand for quiet. Everybody knew he was going to introduce a speaker for the begging campaign, but they did not know whom.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Sandheim said, "I know you all feel that these entr'actes are not the pleasantest part of an evening at the opera, but tonight I feel sure nobody will complain. Someone has come here to speak to you for a few minutes, someone you all know and love, as we know and love her, and someone I have no need to introduce by name." He drew the curtain a little aside and Lena stepped out.

A shout went up all over the house—"Lena Geyer!" From the orchestra, the balcony, the boxes, and the standees everyone took up the cry. Then with one sweeping movement the

whole packed house rose to its feet and started to applaud. George and I were thunderstruck at the quality of this ovation, and at its persistence. George took out his watch, a lifetime habit of hard-bitten business, and kept it in his hand—though that did not prevent him from putting in his roar of “Lena Geyer!” whenever a new salvo started. Lena was quite overcome. She stood there—and I was so glad the curtains were closed behind her, for they mitigated the horrible memory of the last time I had seen her standing alone on that stage—a vital and lovely figure, slender and graceful in a black velvet dress, with her hands stretched out to the shouting audience, and the tears running down her face. She was moved to the heart by the thundering demonstration of loyalty. At last, after George’s watch had ticked off nearly ten minutes and the shouting and the applause had not stopped, she raised her arms and blew them a few kisses and curtseyed and stepped back inside the curtains. She had not said a word. But they told us later that the collections taken up by the girls outside were the biggest that night of the whole campaign.

We four left the box and went downstairs to join Lena and take her home. She was in Gatti’s office having a tearful reunion with as many of the opera-house staff as could crowd in. Everybody wanted to kiss her or hug her or at least shake her hand. She was glad to be there, too; Lena was always fond of the old people at the opera house and on her rare visits there after she stopped singing she always went off and hobnobbed with stagehands and chorus singers and an old carpenter whose wife made wonderful cheese cake and sometimes used to send Lena a piece by her husband.

Everybody had to come in and make a fuss over her that night. When she was finally ready to stop the reception, with its excited greetings and gossip in four or five languages, she

turned to me for her wrap and seemed to stagger slightly as she did so. She put her hand on the back of a chair and gripped it so fiercely that I saw her knuckles turn white. Her head was bent a little away from me but I moved quickly to look at her face. For an instant it was contorted in intense agony. Her forehead was beaded, and she had turned the color of clay. Elsa saw this at the same moment. George and Henry did not ; they were speaking to Sandheim. Elsa and I, naturally, put our arms around Lena and asked her in whispers what was the matter. She had regained her composure and looked at us with a queer flicker in her eyes. She laughed in a nervous tone and said, "Why nothing, you sillies. I must have indigestion, I don't know—it was just a —just a little pain."

Chapter Twenty-five

GEORGE and I sat side by side on an uncomfortable sofa, staring, and not saying a word. There was nothing in the world we could say. George gripped an unlighted cigar in his teeth and kept his watch in his hand. His derby hat was on the back of his head, and his forehead glistened with sweat. I felt as if I were shrinking. The longer we waited the stronger this sensation became. I felt as if a hand on the top of my head were pushing me downward toward the floor. Each time we heard the clang of the elevator door in the hall outside the waiting room, we would move slightly and look away from each other. Then when nobody came near us we would return to our former positions, and continue to stare at a bunch of dried grass in a jardiniere against the wall. All these sensations are peculiarly etched in my mind; the feathery dried grass in that hospital waiting room is the ghastliest symbol in all my memory.

The operation whose outcome we were awaiting contains the single most terrible moment of suspense in modern surgery. It is the moment when, during a surgical examination, a fragment of tissue is rushed to the laboratory to be made instantaneously into what is called a frozen section, and microscopically examined. In this interval the operation is suspended, with the patient under anæsthesia and the incision open, while the surgeons await the pathologist's verdict. This will inform them whether they are operating upon a cancer. And this was the information for which George and I were waiting while they operated on Lena Geyer. It was three

weeks since the night we had all been together at the opera house, three weeks of hideous anxiety and moments of false hope that had ended here in the hospital the day before.

Henry and Elsa, we knew, were upstairs waiting in the room from which Lena had been taken to the operating theatre. When I saw Henry, early that morning, his face was set in rigid lines of fortitude and his eyes looked glassy; he had not seemed to see anything. Elsa was dead white and deathly calm. George and I had not seen Lena since the previous day. She had talked to us then with gaiety, and joked and smiled with much more conviction than either of us had been able to muster. The usual procedure—in this case a transparent futility—of keeping the possible truths of the illness from the patient had been followed. Lena had been quiet, docile, and perfectly obedient to every medical order. George said she reverted to the same childlike pliability she had had all through her long illness twelve years before. But we saw that she knew everything that was being kept from her. There was nothing childish in the expression of her eyes, which were dark with pain, nor in the cords that stood out on her neck and on her hands when she braced herself to endure a spasm.

These pains had not been very frequent in the past three weeks but they were convulsing when they came. A slight hemorrhage had been the immediate reason for taking her to the hospital. We had been allowed only a glimpse of her on the day before the operation. We had not said good-bye when we left her room. She had been chatting with us and then she said, "Run along now, boys, I want to take a nap." She had turned on her side, away from us, and burrowed into the pillow so that we could not see her face. This would not be a fatal operation, we knew; but we knew too that when we saw her face again it might contain the most dread-

ful knowledge in the world, and find that knowledge reflected in us.

After an hour and a quarter, every minute of which we had counted on George's watch, we heard the elevator door again and we saw Henry step out of the car. We both stood up and walked stiffly to meet him. Nobody spoke. One quick glance at his face was enough for us, but somehow it seemed cowardly not to look at him when he had been brave enough to come downstairs to tell us. I remember thinking in that moment, "How can anybody ever try to hide anything about this disease?" At that time I felt as if I could never be aware of anything else. None of us was surprised. George took the cigar out of his mouth, threw it away, and said in a queer cracked voice, "How bad, Henry?"

Henry turned away from us before he answered. "Hopeless," he said.

For Lena Geyer to be condemned to a long-drawn-out death was a cruelty of fate to which we could not become reconciled. George, when he was alone with me, used to clench his fists and rave against the injustice. "Why does it have to be her?" he'd say. "Why couldn't it be some whining piker that didn't deserve anything better? Jesus Christ—with her nerve and courage and the way she's used 'em—why does she have to be tortured now? Why couldn't she go quick if she had to go?"

There was no answer to any of these questions, but there was a lesson for every one of us in Lena's last eight months of life. With an assumption of will-power so tremendous that nobody thought of opposing her, she apprised herself of the main circumstances of her case. Instinctively she knew so much that it was better to tell her the truth, omitting only such details as could be hidden, than to allow

her to be harrowed by uncertainty as well as by pain. But it was not about the technical details of her illness that she was concerned. She did not care what they did to her, what medicines and treatments they gave her, how many nurses and doctors were engaged, or what the routine of her suffering was. In all those respects she remained perfectly passive, as she had done when she was ill before. She cared about the broader features of her fate: how long she would live in ordinary coherence, how much agony she must face, and how soon she might expect to die.

All her life she had made her choices—greatly, consistently, and stoically. She had learned to endure deprivation to achieve what she wanted—and she had wanted great things. She had borne hunger and shabbiness and obscurity, and an austerity of life pitiful in one so young, to gain her foothold. She made her choice when she gave up her love for the sake of her art; she made the same choice a second time when she condemned herself, in the fullness of her beauty and passionate maturity, to celibacy. She paid the enormous price exacted for that decision. She had the courage to rebuild her life according to her own standards, instead of sinking gratefully into luxury and ease that were only too eagerly offered her. Now she wanted one great thing more. She wanted to die bravely and to carry the burden of her suffering as resolutely as she had carried other burdens before.

This might seem like a romantic conception of death and dying—but I knew that it was not, the moment I realized the nature of Lena's illness. Lena Geyer had the most inexorable sense of reciprocity that I have ever known. She believed with her whole soul that there was a price to be paid for everything, that every advantage must have its correlated sacrifice, that every mistake would exact its toll. After Giulio Pizzetti died I was the only person who knew the

hidden roots of Lena's life; and I remained the only one who knew, until death began to lay everything bare.

For it was only to be expected that Henry Loeffler and Elsa would question the source of this hideous disease, and I knew that when they did, they must learn something of Lena's remote and pitiful secret. I had reason to be sure neither of them had ever discovered it, for when Maestro Pizzetti had told it to me, he had said that no human power could have dragged it out of Lena. He felt sure that neither Henry nor Elsa knew it. So I watched them with growing uneasiness during those first days at the hospital after the operation. The inevitable day came when they were shut up for a long time with the doctors, and that evening when I saw them, both looked stunned; Elsa was even more pale and crushed than she had hitherto been; and both she and Henry acted peculiarly toward me. It distressed and alarmed me to realize what they might be feeling. Here was an extraordinary situation: I was aware that these two people were fixed in a determination never to let me discover something about which I already knew much more than they did. I was too devoted to Henry to let him continue under this misapprehension. I told him all that I had learned from Maestro Pizzetti. He seemed, in a tragic way, almost relieved. The bitter knowledge of what Lena had suffered could be a little softened by the thought that someone who loved her had been with her.

It was then that Henry told me what the doctors had said: that sometimes there was no traceable cause for this sinister disease. But in this case they found they had reason to suspect its origin. Lena was dying of a cervical cancer that had spread to the vital abdominal organs and gone beyond control before it was discovered. She must have had symptoms of the original disturbance for many months, which she at-

tempted and, for a time managed, to conceal. But why, Henry had asked, should she have had an original cancer at all? The answer had been, in the doctor's words: "This seems to be a case where ragged tears left after the difficult delivery of a child were improperly repaired, and subsequently—" The doctor never finished that sentence, for Elsa deHaven had fainted for the only time in her life.

Singular things happened to all of us in the months after Lena was brought home from the hospital. She was never out of bed again. Of all the fates she would have loathed, to be helpless and pain-ridden was the most intolerable. Yet she bore it stoically because of the certainty that she was going to die. If there had been any chance for recovery, she could not have rallied the strength for a battle of will-power. Those were her own words; yet actually she was a mine of strength for us all. She did not even have to ask us to be brave, or cheerful, or natural, or calm. We knew she wanted us to be, and we all were, at any rate where she could see us or where we saw one another. Each of us had his daily hours of solitary tragedy.

Henry Loeffler grew thinner and older with awful swiftness. He had drawn very close to me since the day in the hospital when we found each other in possession of Lena's secret. He was paternal, and at the same time dependent upon me. In a sense he treated me as if I were the son of his marriage with Lena. Each time she grew definitely worse, Henry shrivelled a little more. He would not leave the apartment if he could help it, and most of the time he was with her. When he saw her in great pain a look of passionate resolution would cross his face, as if he were trying to bear it for her.

We would all have borne it for her if we could. We lived

a strange, intense life, necessarily without relaxation or perspective. George Phillips was gentle and boyishly tender and considerate as nobody could have believed, yet capable of insane outbursts of rage and protest. I found him, more than once, alone in his office, madly cursing every fate and deity that could ever have touched her. Elsa deHaven, whose hair turned white in six months, moved like a ghost, with her eyes seemingly twice their former size, and her mouth grimly disciplined. I knew she seldom slept. Dora would not go to bed at night, but would wait until the others had, and would then kneel outside her mistress's door with her rosary and silently pray until morning. Even she, ignorant and crude, never let Lena see her grieving. Though she had frowned and scowled all her life she learned now to smile in a heartrending wooden way, and would pause outside Lena's door to fix this expression on her face before entering. Where she had once been jealous of the nurses who had cared for Lena, she realized now that only they could make her comfortable at all, and since there was nothing she could do for her mistress, she appointed herself to every disagreeable and repulsive task of which she could relieve the nurses. Once I went into the old rag room to call her and found her huddled on the floor with her head buried in one of Lena's *Carmen* costumes.

Lena clung to us all, but not in despair or panic. She knew that sooner or later she would lie there, alive, yet not alive, unable to give us her big, sudden smile, the looks of warmth and tenderness and even mischief of which she was still capable. She spoke very little but she liked to hear us talk. She would listen to my account of a performance at the opera, to which I would go just to look for things to tell her about, and she would smile at my pantomime imitation of a bad singer. But sometimes this smile would be ripped off her

face like the mask it was, and nothing she could do could hide the agony of the fire that sliced through her. This began to happen oftener after a few weeks, and from then on we saw less of Lena and more of a gray, wasted, grim-faced figure lying on her bed, sometimes making muffled sounds, sometimes horribly silent, with the inevitably alert nurse and the inevitable needle near by. I used to try not to remember her green eyes and her smooth brown hair and her clear white skin when I sat beside her after everything—hair, skin, eyes, and lips—had turned the same dreadful gray. And we all pretended we did not see the heavy peasant bones pushing through the taut parchment skin.

At first we used to think of distraction for her—books to read to her, games that we could play near her bed while she lay and watched us, which she liked to do, or small amusing things to bring her. After she returned from the hospital, she consented for the first time to have a radio in her house. Lena had always been fanatical about certain things, and ever since the time when she found she had made poor phonograph records she had had no use for reproduced music of any kind. She claimed to have coined the term "canned music" and said it was in the same disgusting class as canned food, if not worse. She insisted on living in oblivion of the phonograph and the radio. But Henry persuaded her to let him put a radio in her bedroom after she was ill, so that she could hear the Sunday concerts of the Philharmonic, to which she had gone for years. She would not let the radio be turned on for anything else. She did like to have Sam Rosenau come and play for her, and for weeks he came every afternoon, to sit in the drawing room with the doors open and play whatever she was in the mood for. Sometimes it was part of an opera score, sometimes his accompaniments of the songs she had liked best to sing. But one day when Sam

came in to say good-bye to her after he finished playing, she had a fearful spasm of pain while he was standing there. It unnerved him, and Lena knew it. She told George not to let Sam come any more. "Poor darling," she said, "I'm sorry he'll remember that."

Gradually there was less we could do for Lena, and at last nothing. By the middle of January medicine kept her unconscious most of the time. She could be lucid at intervals, but the intervals drew farther apart, as she became at last only a receptacle for intolerable pain. Once in a great while there was a respite of more than usual length, and during these she would whisper pleas not to be so heavily drugged, so that she might recognize the faces she loved once or twice more.

One evening I was sitting in the room next to hers, looking at the newspaper and, as usual now, when I thought I was reading, seeing nothing, when a name started from the blurred print before me. It was that of Guido Vestri, of whom none of us had thought in all this interminable year. I read that he was to conduct a gala concert in London the following day, which would be broadcast to New York. The program was printed, and on it were the Prelude and *Liebestod* from *Tristan*. Silently I handed the paper to Henry, indicating the question in my mind. He looked at me and nodded acquiescence slowly. He went to Lena's room.

We knew that if she had been able to express a last wish it would have been this. The nurse had withheld some of the morphine and Lena was dimly conscious at the time when I turned on the radio. Henry leaned over her and said, "Lena dear, Guido Vestri is playing *Tristan* for you." I could not bear to look toward the bed when the opening *pianissimo* began miraculously to steal from the instrument, and when the moment of suspense, lest this should not sound like the

music we knew, hung over us. But it was the music we knew. It was unmistakable, and terrible in its directness. Twenty years fell away, and everything that this woman we loved had meant to us rose glowing before us as the music brought her back. Now I could look fearlessly toward the shell on the bed, toward the white-haired man bowed beside it, and toward the door where her friends stood, knowing that this was farewell. To each of us she came again, her voice flaming on the sounds that had made her immortal. Through all the passion of the Prelude we stood, each in his place, each living again the torrential anticipation with which we had heard this before. Then as the orchestra moved to the whispered notes that had drawn her soul sighing to her lips, I looked once more at her face, not afraid, though I knew what I would find. Her eyes were open, with their last gleam of light, and the cracked and shrivelled lips drawn taut over the wide jaws were moving in their lines with the music.